The Washington Monthly

JULY/AUGUST
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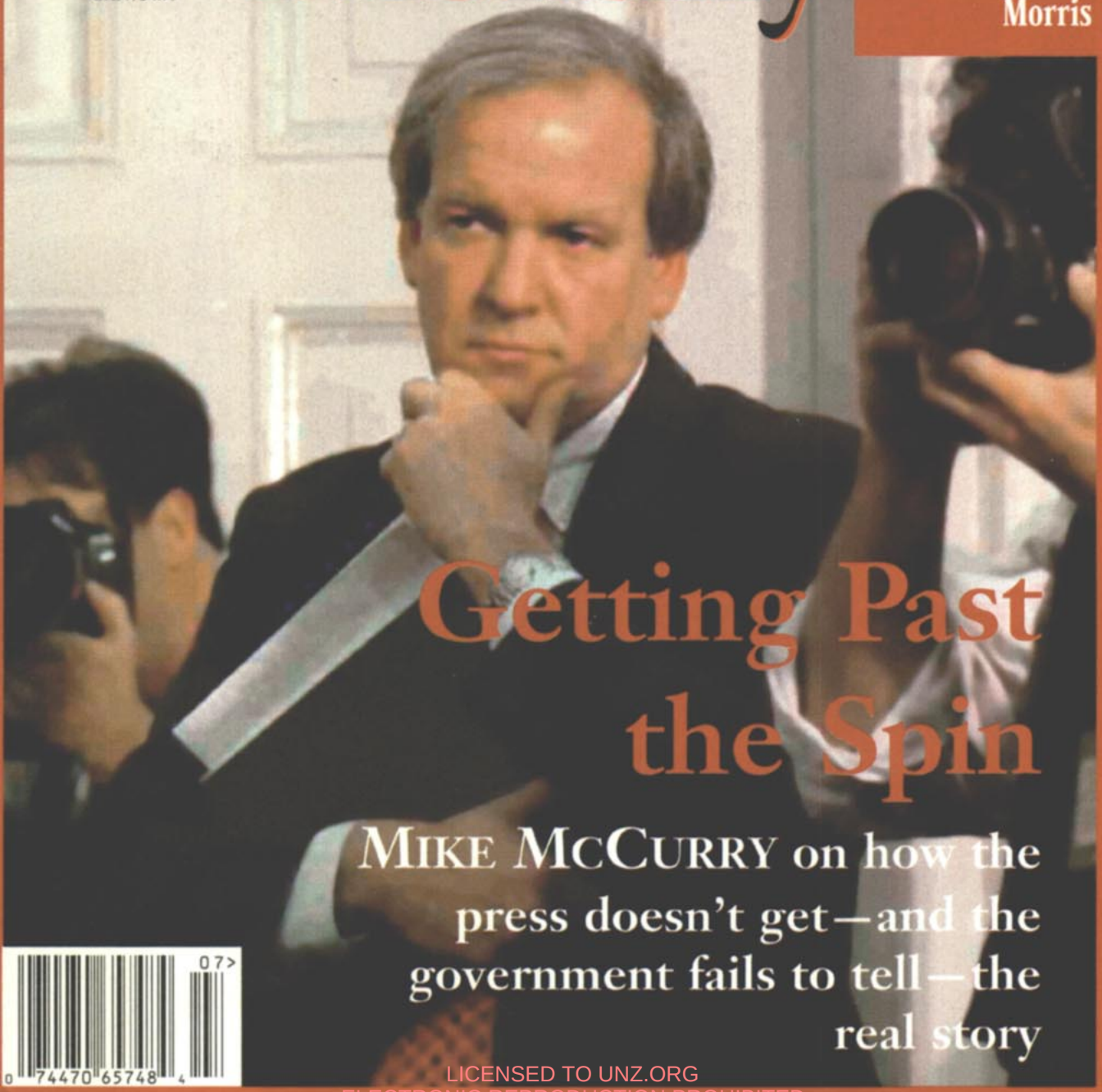

Getting Past the Spin

MIKE MCCURRY on how the press doesn't get—and the government fails to tell—the real story

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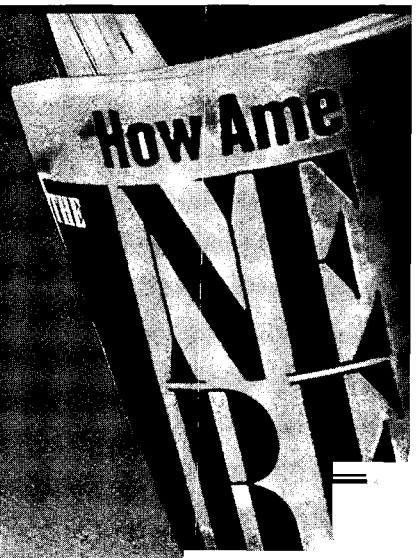

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Letters

Not So Silent

Jason DeParle is a fine journalist. "The Silence of the Liberals" (April 1999) is not one of his better pieces of work. He puts forward a reasonably sound post-welfare agenda for "liberals" but claims in effect that he is the only one who ever said it out loud within recent memory. That is pure bunk. Establishment Washington, both political and journalistic, may not be doing anything with the story, but that doesn't mean it isn't there. And it's there not just at the level of talk. In locality after locality there are people working with some success on many of the issues DeParle lists. They would be more successful if there were more support from Washington, but they are doing cutting-edge, sophisticated work.

In DeParle's mind, it seems, the only relevant place to see whether liberals are saying or doing anything is inside the Beltway. We agree with him that serious attention to the concentrated, racialized poverty of the inner-city is a matter of the highest priority, but we're not sure who besides Senator Paul Wellstone and a handful of others in Washington get it, and we know that between this president and this Republican Congress nobody is about to do anything serious about it as a matter of national policy, the empowerment zone program notwithstanding. The last time we looked, Congress was taking away $350 million in hard-won and badly needed funds from the Section 8 housing program in order to finance the pork in the recent supplemental appropriations bill.

There is a lot of action on the issues DeParle wants attended to, but it's not in Washington and it's seldom covered by journalists, including DeParle. We look forward to a president and Congress who will be more responsive to the important agenda that DeParle lays out.

ANDREW MOTT AND
PETER EDELMAN
CENTER FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE
Washington, D.C.

Tenure Trap

Robert Worth's essay on tenure ("The Velvet Prison," May 1999) was right on target. The odd thing is that the problems would be so easy to fix, but the fix is not embraced either by faculty or by administrators for fear of disrupting the status quo. All the protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, academics are thoroughly conservative when it comes to our own self-interest.

MARSHALL E. MCMAHON
PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AND
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
RHODES COLLEGE
Memphis, Tenn.

Thank you for Robert Worth's article about the tenure system in universities (May 1999). As a former lettuce-picker adjunct and contract professor at three universities, I can attest to the truth of every material statement in the article.

In addition to the flagrant inequities it engenders and the plantation system of management it imposes on universities, tenure is economically unworkable and unjustifiable. Its practical consequence is to guarantee lifetime employment (and we're talking about long working lives) to the highest-paid, and, as Mr. Worth points out, frequently least-productive segment of the institutional labor force. More than a few universities and state university systems have come to recognize the economic predicament tenure creates. Few have done anything about it.

Mr. Worth's piece does a great service by exposing the speciousness of the arguments supporting tenure and the intellectual dishonesty of those who advance them.

BILL HUEY
Atlanta, GA

Licensed Mediocrity

I enjoyed your article on teacher education in the May issue ("Method Madness") but wanted to add another perspective on lack of preparedness on the part of public school teachers.

I have a doctorate in biology and taught introductory biology courses at a local university for eight years before my children were born. Many of the freshmen I taught were unprepared for college in such basic areas as constructing a graph—something taught in elementary school. So after my children started school, I decided that I might have a bigger impact as a teacher if I were to teach in lower grades.

I quickly found that my credentials in the subject area and my teaching experience would not secure me a job in the public schools. I was told to go back to school for two years, take those methodology courses mentioned in your article, and then I would be hired as an entry level teacher at $18,000 per year. And I am not the only one. I know a number of individuals who are "content competent," that is, they know something about the subject they would like to teach and would make wonderful teachers. They are not welcomed by the educational community, even though there is a shortage of math and science teachers.

While alternative certification is on the books in many states, colleges of education and the educational establishment ensure that it is never practiced.

KATHLEEN CASON
Athens, GA

Fear of Falling

Re: "Tilting at Windmills," May 1999: "Terrified paratroopers" is based on poor understanding of parachute training. Fear of stepping out into empty space is human. In 59 jumps I made as a 'trooper, I never failed to be afraid. But overcoming that fear is partly pride and partly training. The instructions you deride are valuable precisely because they reduce panic by providing practical action. Failure of both main and reserve parachutes is extremely rare, but the training you ridicule would likely save a life at the altitudes most peace-time jumps are made from.

Re: Ralph Peters' article in the same issue: Peters is right on. Noblesse oblige is becoming very rare. I left the service in 1965 after seeing combat in

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WWII and Korea and saw the deterioration then. Today we have political generals. True, the military must be subordinate. I fully supported the relief of Gen. MacArthur. But they must be true to their calling and their people. As an Army veteran, I share Peters' shame in knowing that the Marines are the only service with any true military honor left at the top and middle.

ROBERT E. BURT
LT. COL.
U.S. ARMY (RET.)

False Prophet

Author Ralph Peters really is a national treasure. Judging from his May essay, "Hucksters in Uniform," he is one of the very few people in America who can predict with confidence the character of warfare in the year 2020. This enables him to dismiss most of the Pentagon's current weapons-investment program as the product of myopic vision and corrupt motives. I presume that at earlier points in his career, he also beat the intelligence community in predicting the collapse of communism and the Asian financial crisis.

I have long admired Mr. Peters' insights into the psychology of warfare. But his understanding of why weapons are bought seems very superficial. He correctly notes that the versatile V-22 tiltrotor aircraft is essential to the future effectiveness of the Marine Corps. But the further away from ground combat he gets, the more tenuous his grasp grows. Consider three Air Force planes he attacks, the F-22, the C-130J transport, and the B-2 bomber.

He says the stealthy F-22 is "supremely unnecessary," even thought it is the first air superiority fighter the Air Force has developed in a quarter-century. Air superiority—control of the skies—is the main reason why no American troops have been killed by hostile aircraft since the Korean War. Does he really expect the service to continue flying 1960's vintage airframes for over half a century while the rest of the world stands still?

Then there is the "unwanted" C-130J, a plane that in earlier versions actually has been operational for nearly half a century. Unfortunately, many have gotten so old that the service has given up trying to predict when repairs will be needed—it just waits for cracks to appear and then fixes them. If that sounds dangerous, then maybe buying the newest version might not be such a bad idea.

LOREN THOMPSON
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICE,
LEXINGTON INSTITUTE
Arlington, VA

Charter Members

Estimates of the importance of "the family," the New York intellectuals gathered around *Partisan Review* from the thirties through the sixties, will vary. Most of its members will have gone to such rewards as they can collect. Wherever they are, they would be delighted that the very mention of their existence still evokes argument. May I, in tribute to them, differ from Ms. Joyce Lasky Reed's letter (May 1999) about Norman Podhoretz?

First, Professors Sidney Hook and Lionel Trilling were not founders of the group. The distinction goes to the late Philip Rahv and to William Phillips, happily still with us, who founded *Partisan Review* in 1934 when they were not impossibly distant from the American Communist Party.

Second, for the latter part of their lives, neither Professor Sidney Hook or Professor Lionel Trilling identified themselves as Trotskyites. Each was rather discreet about his past attachments, which included considerable sympathy for the Soviet Union. Professor Hook depicted himself as a liberal with a favorable view of the welfare state. Professor Trilling thought of himself as a liberal but did not deal with questions like the distribution of national income, but rather with cultural and moral issues. Each, of course, made of anti-Communism a secular religion.

Third, it is inaccurate (as well as in poor taste) to refer to Podhoretz as a Sammy Glick. His significance is far larger and ought to be considered in more serious terms.

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Subscription rates: U.S. and possessions: one year, $39.95; two years, $76.95; three years, $109.95. For Canadian and foreign subscriptions, add $7 for surface delivery; air mail delivery add $32. Back issues, $5. Send correspondence concerning subscriptions, undelivered copies, and address changes to 1611 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20009. For address changes, provide six weeks' notice and include old address label. Send subscription complaints to Charles Peters, *The Washington Monthly*, 1611 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20009. *The Washington Monthly* is indexed in the Book Review Index, Political Science Abstracts, Public Affairs Information Service, the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, and Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory and may be obtained on microfilm from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. For reprint rights call Lydia Polgreen at (202) 462-0128. Published monthly except combined Jan./Feb. and July/Aug. issues by The Washington Monthly Co., 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Printed in U.S.A.

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ISSN 0043-0633. Postmaster: Send change of address to *The Washington Monthly*, 1611 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20009. Periodicals postage paid at Mechanicsburg, PA. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Send manuscripts and letters to: Editors, 1611 Connecticut Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20009 or e-mail to: **editors@washingtonmonthly.com.**

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Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

The Scent of a Rose • Cheapskate Chic • Pornography 101 • The Casket Store • Predatory Pricing

TWENTY YEARS AGO, MORE than three-fourths of the members of Congress were veterans. Today the figure has dwindled to one-third. This means a Congress that is less knowledgeable about military matters and issues affecting veterans. And it is additional evidence that the people who have the power in this country are not those who have felt an obligation to serve it.

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REMEMBER THE SCENT OF A rose? I hope you do, because the memory may be all we have left. The scientists have reduced or eliminated the fragrance of roses and other flowers in the interest of selective breeding. Flowers have been bred "for color, size, and shelf life without any attention to scent," a Purdue University horticulturist recently explained to Joyce Howard Price of *The Washington Times*. In the process floral scent is fast disappearing.

This reminds me of what happened to melons and tomatoes when the scientists began experimenting in order to make them better withstand the rigors of shipping. Their mouth-watering taste was lost.

This makes you worry about what science will do if it starts breeding people. They will surely be attractive and durable—but will probably lack all the distinctive qualities that make human beings interesting, even delightful.

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I'M INDEBTED TO MY OLD friend Morton Mintz, one of the truly great investigative reporters, for pointing out a curious news judgment by *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. On June 2, the World Bank released a report saying that, as a result of the economic crisis in Asia and its aftermath, the number of people living on less than $1 a day will reach 1.5 billion by the end of this year—that's 1.5 billion human beings, each struggling to survive for 24 hours on less that we spend for a ride on the subway. The *Times* thought this news only worth page C-7. The *Post* didn't run it at all.

Kosovo provides another occasion for Bill Clinton's critics to eat crow.

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I HAVE A FRIEND who is a university president. His name is Douglas Bennet. He is the father of James Bennet, who worked here before he went to *The New York Times*. Against my advice, Doug became the president of Wesleyan University. I said there's too much fund-raising and too much possibility for getting into hot water for things you didn't do. I don't know if the fundraising part has come true but the innocent hot water has been a case of total immersion. On May 8, he woke up to read a story in the *Hartford Courant* that revealed Wesleyan had a course requiring students to create their own work of pornography. One student submitted a film that focused on a man's eyes while he was masturbating. Another filmed a female student in sexual bondage.

I have great sympathy for Doug. How was he to have known this sort of thing was going on? After all, as Andrea Billups of *The Washington Times* points out in her story about the episode, and as anyone who ever attended college will understand, not a single student complained.

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WHEN THE COLUMNIST Matthew Miller worked at OMB during the early Clinton years, he was such a deficit hawk that when you had lunch with him you had to resign yourself to listening to at least a twenty-minute lecture on the importance of reducing the federal budget. So when Matt says "not-to-worry" about the size of a budget item, I pay attention. And he says, "there is no Social Security problem—at least none that requires abrupt action. Higher productivity means faster growth, which increases the size of the pie from which the boomers' golden years will be funded." Until productivity, which recently has been growing at four percent, trends steadily downward, we have time to ponder what long-range social security reforms are most desirable. This may be one of those cases where procrastination is the prudent course.

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"MORE PEOPLE ARE GETTING IN the way of disaster," explains Harold Brooks, a researcher at the National Severe Storms Laboratory in Norman, Okla. What he means is that more people are choosing to live in the places most likely to be hit by floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, or hurricanes. Does it make sense for the tax-

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payers to reward this choice by paying compensation for losses incurred during a disaster that should have been anticipated when the choice was made?

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TO GET AN IDEA OF THE WEALTH sloshing around Manhattan, consider that twenty years ago it had just three fancy food stores—Balducci's in the Village, Dean & DeLuca in SoHo, and Zabar's on the Upper West Side. Today, "there are dozens" according to *The New York Times*, "offering a stupefying supply of exotic—and often expensive—food." There are five of the high-end markets within just seven blocks from Broadway and 74th Street. One, Food Emporium, even has, according to the *Times*, "a green-and-white-uniformed doorman with a gold-braided cap who calls cabs for customers."

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STILL, THE CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION news is not all dismaying. In a recent article, "Cheapskate Chic," *The Wall Street Journal* noted that bargain basement items like $16.99 dresses from K-Mart are suddenly hot with the IPO crowd. Anything that allows people to feel less obsessed with making money and freer to follow their hearts is a good thing and a long time passion of this magazine. But I was depressed to see that the trend isn't just for cheap chic. It's for pairing with those K-Mart dresses outlandishly expensive items like a $65,000 Mercedes and a $215 Kate Spade handbag. However, I will try to view the glass as half full.

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IF YOU WERE EVER BULLIED AS A child—and most of us were—you know in your heart that some of the bad kids were really bad. And you were right. According to a study by the National School Safety Center, half of them have trouble with the law as adults and 25 percent turn out to be serious career criminals.

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FUNERALS COST TOO MUCH. WE all know they do. Yet the scandal persists. One reason is, of course, that the customer is usually tearful and in no condition to bargain. But the other is less well known. It is that the funeral business usually is in charge of its own regulation. Compliant state legislatures have set up regulatory bodies whose membership is by law or custom dominated by funeral directors. Anyone who dares charge reasonable prices is their mortal enemy. For example, The Casket Store in Knoxville, Tennessee offered caskets at almost 75 percent less than the price charged by funeral homes in the area. So what happened? The state ordered it to shut down because it wasn't licensed by the Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers. Why should you need a license to sell caskets?

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ROBERT WORTH, WHO WROTE about the need for better ways to spot bad teachers in his piece on tenure in our May issue, got a letter suggesting one from his brother, Monty, who is a high school teacher. Since it was an idea the *Monthly* had advocated, I naturally thought, "How brilliant!" Anyway, here it is:

"Who really knows whether teachers are doing a good job? Students, of course. I think that principals should regularly confidentially survey students about their teachers. Of course some of them will say nasty things out of spite, but I have found that the vast majority of them (even 7th graders) provide balanced feedback. Students will say 'he's tough, but fair' or 'it's a lot of work, but you learn a lot.'"

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AT THIS YEAR'S TONY AWARDS one of the musical numbers was "I've Got the Sun in the Morning" from *Annie Get Your Gun*. Few viewers knew that the song was, to put it gently, unconsciously borrowed from a National Shoe commercial that was featured on New York radio stations in the mid-'40s. Even composers as gifted as Irving Berlin could be influenced by other melodies they happened to hear. I seem to remember that Cole Porter was similarly guilty in the case of "Don't Fence Me In!" This phenomenon is not unknown in journalism. The columnist Richard Reeves once called this magazine the most unacknowledged source in Washington. To be sure, much of this has been unconscious theft. But not all. We're small enough that the cynical think they can lift an item or two without anyone knowing. I'm sure, however, that most of it is innocent. All of us have had the experience where we remember an idea or a fact we saw somewhere but forget where we saw it. Or indeed we forget that it was anything but our own discovery.

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THE DEADWOOD IN THE CIVIL service consists of just 3.7 percent of federal employees, according to a recent report by the Office of Personnel Management. That's the good news. The bad news is that the poor performers have been on the job for an average of 14 years. In other words, they haven't been fired but have been permitted to continue messing up. Even more unsettling is that the report rates as "OK performers" employees who meet "minimum performance objectives." When I was a government employee I found this group the most demoralizing of all. They always did the least they could get away with. They never tried to do the most. You can't tolerate such people and have an effective workforce. Yet the civil service endows them with a righteous sense of entitlement to their jobs.

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PAUL LIGHT AND DON KETTL, whose article appears in this issue, are among the tiny group of political scientists who understand the civil service. Light recently wrote this about it in *The Washington Post*:

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"It is slow in the hiring, almost useless in the firing, overly permissive in the promoting, out of touch with actual performance in the rewarding," all of which I can confirm from my own experience.

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RECENT EVENTS IN YUGOSLAVIA should have had a humbling effect on all the experts who proclaimed that air power alone can't do the job. That is one of those lessons history appears to have taught that on closer inspection require amendment. As Philip A. True pointed out in our May letters section, allied air power may well have had a decisive effect on the Normandy landing in World War II. The Luftwaffe had been so weakened by its battles against the Allied air force that it could only put two planes in the air to strafe the beaches on D-Day. Bombing-induced fuel shortages and transport problems had crippled the German ability to counter-attack.

Social Security may be one of those cases where procrastination is the prudent course.

Many of us mistakenly applied the lessons of Vietnam and Afghanistan to the Gulf War. But jungles and mountains in those wars limited the power of airplanes and tanks to win the quick victory that proved possible in the desert. Similarly, misapplication of the "don't-cross-the-38th parallel" lesson from Korea may have been a factor in our failure to destroy Iraq's army after it had been evicted from Kuwait. Even in Vietnam, where the bombing often seemed ineffective or too costly in civilian lives, there is considerable evidence that heavy bombing of the North in December 1972 was what finally induced the communists to agree to peace. The lessons of history are there to be learned. It's just that they seldom are as sweeping as we remember them. The critics of airpower are right to say it didn't destroy German morale or German industry until very near the end of World War II, but wrong in not understanding how effective it was in reducing the effectiveness of German armor and air defenses. In Yugoslavia, we probably would have faced long bloody battles if we had tried to invade through mountainous terrain. If, on the other hand, we would have gone in through the mostly flat land from Hungry to Belgrade our tanks might have proved as easily decisive as they were in the Gulf War.

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KOSOVO PROVIDES another occasion for Bill Clinton's critics to eat crow. Of course, they will probably find some reason to deny him credit. Too many of the nation's brightest people are so committed to thinking he's a disaster that they are no longer capable of giving him even grudging or partial credit for such triumphs as seven years of incredible prosperity. What fascinates me is that these people are often right in the specifics of their distaste. There's a lot not to admire in this man. So I agree, for example, with practically every thing my friend Marjorie Williams says against him in this issue. But I totally disagree with her conclusion that he should have been impeached. I continue to think history will place him in the mid-rank of American presidents; not one of the greats, but certainly not one of the disasters.

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I HOPE LONG TIME READERS OF the *Monthly* will indulge my saluting ourselves once again. For years, this magazine was among the few faint voices to champion the A-10 Warthog fighter. As you may know, this all-too-unglamorous fighter was once opposed and then reluctantly accepted by the Air Force because it lacked the sex appeal of planes like the B-1 and B-2 bombers. The Air Force also had little interest in the A-10 because its primary mission was to provide close air support for the Army which, as any veteran will tell you, is not the highest priority of the air force brass. Well, it turns out that the A-10 was the real hero of the war in Kosovo. It busted Yugoslav artillery positions and tanks while the Army's Apache helicopters sat idle in Macedonia, plagued by mechanical failures. And what of those fancy stealth fighters? They did fine, although one of them did crash, but they hardly justified their Gold Card price tag. It took the Gulf War to save the A-10 from extinction. I sincerely pray that this most recent success will persuade the Air Force that its A-10 force is not only worth keeping but expanding in an age when long-range nuclear missles are of little use in wars where people are shooting at each other at close range.

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WHY DOES GEN. BARRY MCCAFFREY, the White House Drug Czar resist including alcohol in the national anti-drug media campaign? His office says doing so would dilute the message and that it may exceed his statutory authority. The first is just plain wrong. Drinking is not only the most widespread substance abuse problem but often is the first step to other drugs. As to the statutory authority, there is a bill pending in Congress sponsored by Democratic Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard and Republican Rep. Frank Wolf that can take care of that problem. We hope the White House isn't dragging its feet on this one because of opposition from the liquor and beer interests.

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WE KNEW FROM THE ITALIAN ski gondola tragedy that the Chinese Embassy bombing wasn't the only error traceable to bad maps.

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But I had no idea, until Lisa Getter of *The Los Angeles Times* looked into the history of mapping mistakes, that in her words "Incomplete or inaccurate charts produced by the National Imagery and Mapping Agency and its predecessor organization have played a role in at least a dozen accidents since 1985." A Navy officer who investigated the Italian gondola accident wrote in a memo, "NIMA reminded me of a fast-food place. If you knew how the food was prepared, you wouldn't eat there. It sends chills down my spine to think that I relied on this information to keep me from hitting a tower or other obstruction."

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ANTITRUST ENFORCEMENT, which languished for too long, has recently come back in Clinton's second term. Not only has the Department of Justice stood up to Microsoft bullying, it has sued a major airline, American, for trying to eliminate competition with predatory pricing. How does American do it? If a competitor appears, American lowers prices below cost for long enough to drive away the competition. Then it raises prices back to the too-high level that originally attracted the competition. If you doubt that predatory pricing exists, consider the testimony of Alfred Kahn, not some nutty lefty but the father of airline deregulation. When Edwin McDowell of *The New York Times* asked him if he disagreed with economists who say there is no such thing as predatory pricing, Kahn replied: "My answer is not only yes but that the airline industry is particularly susceptible to it."

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THIS REMINDS ME OF ANOTHER surprising quote, this from the conservative William Rehnquist, who recently told graduates of Washington and Lee, according to The Associated Press, "that the legal profession puts too much emphasis on making money." Rehnquist went on to explain something all lawyers but not many laymen know—that the "dark side" of the law is the emphasis on billable hours. "The client will be billed for the time of the associates at a substantially higher rate than the associates are paid by the firm."

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BELL ATLANTIC IS SCREWING the people of Washington again—and this year the screwing is even worse. You may recall my complaint that 1998 business listings could not be found in the regular phone book but were in the front of the yellow pages. This meant that to find a business number, you had to risk a hernia by picking up the 2 1/2 inch thick yellow pages. The regular book, down to only residential listings, was just 1/2 an inch thick. Why not put the business listings back in with the residential and have two books of manageable size? That may have seemed the sensible, customer-friendly course. But it might have made it a bit harder for Bell Atlantic to sell advertising in the yellow pages since people would no longer be compelled to turn to them for business numbers. So what did Bell Atlantic do? This year it has put both business and residential numbers together at the front of the yellow pages. This creates a phone book that is more than three inches thick. It also means that the elderly and the physically handicapped will have to call Information for each number they don't know. But, of course, Bell Atlantic makes money off that call, too.

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"THE HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY loves to say Medicare should act more like a business," writes Laurie McGinley of *The Wall Street Journal*. "But now that the program is trying to adopt private-sector strategies, many in the industry are squawking." What is the terrible threat that has the fellows so stirred up? Competitive bidding. Medicare is asking HMOs in Phoenix and Kansas City to state how much they would charge for each new patient. Really outrageous, huh?

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AN EPISODE THAT HAS LONG fascinated this magazine was a 1994 lunch that Judge David Sentelle had with Republican senators Lauch Faircloth and Jesse Helms. Did that conversation have anything to do with Sentelle's later naming of Ken Starr as independent counsel? Shortly after the event, Sentelle told *The Washington Post*, "nothing in these discussions concerned independent counsel matters." But in April of this year, Sentelle altered his story a bit. "They [the senators] may have said, 'Have you appointed an independent counsel yet?' And I would have said no. There may have been some discussion in one sentence of had we done it."

There is no question that Sentelle's appointment of Starr pleased the Republican senators. Senator Faircloth rewarded Judge Sentelle's wife with a job on his staff—a fact that went almost completely unnoticed by the media. When I mentioned it on C-Span as recently as last December Brian Lamb said, "Are you sure? I hadn't heard that." Since Brian has to rank near the top of Washington's best-informed list, I'm sure most of the viewers assumed I was wrong. But it's the truth. For verification, you can check the Senate payroll records.

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WHY DO I SUSPECT THAT George W. will be our next president? One reason is that people seem to have decided. They like what they hear and they're going to vote for him unless his campaign screws up royally. I had a similar feeling about Jimmy Carter in 1976. The other factor is guilt. I suspect that people feel guilty about regicide, particularly since they feel they did it to a nice guy when they rejected George W.'s dad in 1992. If you doubt the force of guilt in American politics, consider 1964. People weren't voting for LBJ. They were voting for JFK. ●

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All Expenses Paid

Exploring the ethical swamp of travel writing

BY ELIZABETH AUSTIN

I AM STANDING STARK NAKED IN A LUSH Balinese ricefield. Warm water from a sacred hot spring is spilling over my shoulders and dripping down my sunbaked back. After the sacred waters complete their healing work, a deferential driver in a crisp uniform will whisk me back to my private villa in one of the most luxurious resorts in the world, where a trained masseuse is waiting to knead my travel-weary muscles, scour my skin with exotic grains, slather me all over with yogurt, and lead me to a warm, deep bath scented with fresh frangipangi blossoms. Later, I'll enjoy a gourmet dinner and carefully selected wines at the hotel's world-renowned restaurant, while gently insistent gamelan music tinkles in the background. Finally, after a refreshing dip in my villa's private plunge pool, I'll draw the billowing mosquito netting around my wide bed and dream of another day in paradise. And it's not going to cost me one thin dime.

I was a travel whore. This is my story.

Like so many other good girls gone bad, I could try to excuse myself by arguing that everybody does it. Unbeknownst to readers, an astonishing number of travel articles are based on press junkets and complimentary travel and lodgings; although a few magazines and newspapers refuse all free travel, some of their reporters have been known to wheedle free upgrades and price reductions that might not be offered to their readers.

But, at the risk of self-justification, I'm not sure press trips are quite the crooked little racket that some journalism critics would have you believe. Obviously, an investigative reporter who regularly skimmed a cool $10,000 in goods and services from her sources would lose all her credibility—and her job. But in the world of travel journalism, the lines aren't so clearly drawn. Almost all travel stories tend to wax lyrical about the awesome views, crisp bedlinens and piquant cuisine, no matter who's footing the bill. Travel writers know they're generally expected to accentuate the positive. The real ethical problems in travel junkets are murkier than they seem, because it's never quite clear who's giving what to whom, how much it really costs, and precisely what quid they're expecting for their quo.

I Used to be a Nice Girl Too

Back in my spotless girlhood, I would never have considered accepting an all-expense-paid press trip. Although I've been a part-time travel writer for nearly 15 years, most of my work was published in a magazine that forbids its writers to accept any freebies from airlines, hotels, restaurants, or tourism boards. So I adopted a tone of haughty disdain when publicists offered to whisk me off to Scandinavia for midsummernight or tour me through romantic castles on the west coast of Ireland. "I'm not that kind of girl," I insisted primly. And if occasionally other publications sent me off on trips that had a whiff of junket about them, I simply didn't inquire too closely. The financial arrangements were my editor's problem; I was just there to get the facts, write my story, and serve the public weal.

Then I got an offer I couldn't refuse. In my own defense, let me say that I was in an extremely vulnerable state. A broken heart had left me wandering under a cloud so dense I could use it for sunscreen. Nothing seemed to lighten my mood—until I came home and found a message from an editor at a new women's magazine: "Would you like to go to Bali?"

I knew I should say no, but I could feel my principles melting. The closest I'd ever been to the tropics was the Enchanted Tiki Room at Disney World. So after about 22 seconds of intense internal debate, I picked up the phone and traded away all my journal-

ELIZABETH AUSTIN *recently turned down press trips to the British Virgin Islands and the Maldives.*

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istic integrity for a free trip to the Island of the Gods.

The trip was organized by a Los Angeles-based public relations firm, employed by a deluxe hotel chain to introduce the traveling public to its fancy new properties. Certainly, the hotel could accomplish that goal with a massive advertising blitz. However, that's a pricey option; a single full-page ad in *Condé Nast Traveler* magazine reportedly costs a whopping $50,000. And an ad lacks the credibility of a seasoned travel writer swooning over a resort's breathtaking setting and lavish amenities. So a hotel definitely gets its money's worth when it lays out a mere $100 in actual cash per person per day to show a band of dusty scribes a good time.

When our group—seven women writers and our publicist/escort—arrived at the airport, we quickly learned that some travel whores are more equal than others. Two of the women were junior-level editors at major women's magazines, which often dole out these excursions as no-cost perks to the small fry (who may not even be asked to write about their trips). However, the publicist's clients don't know that, so they're delighted to meet representatives from such prestigious media outlets. Our publicist was so desperate to snare staffers from the big New York magazines that she paid for their flights from New York to Los Angeles. The rest of us, mostly freelance writers from lowlier magazines, had to wheedle airfare from our editors or pay for the first leg of the trip ourselves.

Once we were settled into the double-wide seats of business class, our wrangler doled out our thick itineraries. The heading read, "Schedule for FAM trip to Bali." "What does FAM mean?" I asked the woman seated beside me. She laughed knowingly at my innocence; I felt like Brooke Shields in *Pretty Baby*. "FAM stands for familiarization tour, of course," she explained. Later, I learned that most FAM trips are big (sometimes huge) group trips that haul journalists by bus or van around a destination's best-known, best-loved sites; it's basically the travel writer's version of an NFL highlights video. (Other junkets are more personalized; depending on the publication and the destination, a writer can sometimes arrange a complimentary private tour.)

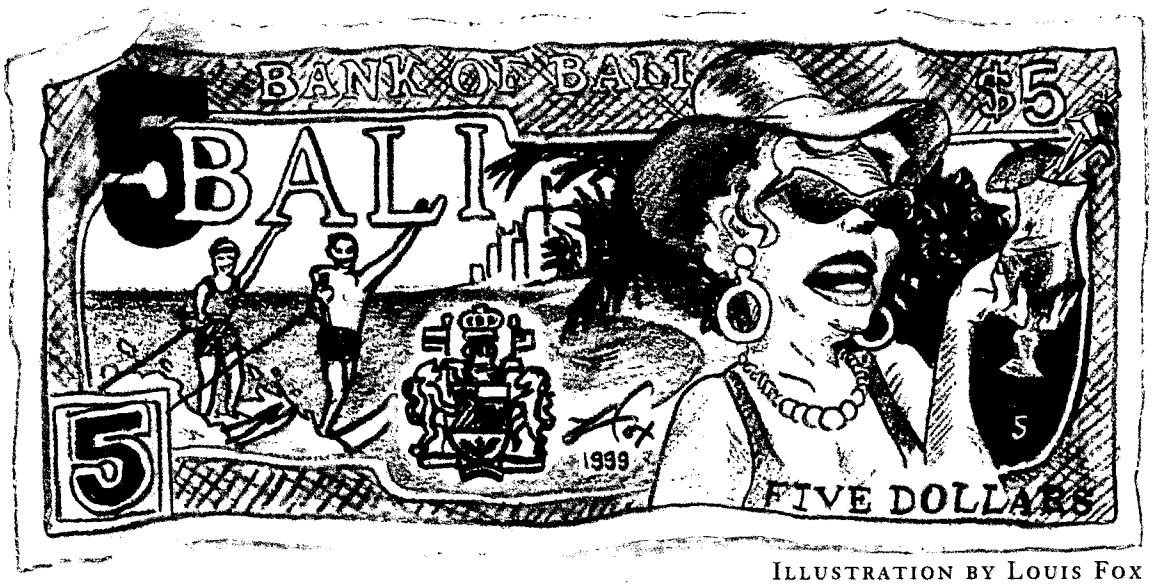

ILLUSTRATION BY LOUIS FOX

When we finally arrived on the island, it was as if I had walked out of the black-and-white sketch of my everyday life and landed in the Crayola Big Box. The resort itself was stunning (and I'm not just saying that because they let me stay there for free. Really.) My secluded villa, which rents out for about $500 a night, was so outrageously romantic that, back home, it would veer dangerously toward kitsch. From my airy bedroom, a glass-paned door led to an outdoor shower, enclosed by mossy walls, where water drizzled out from a wooden pipe under the watch of a carved stone idol. It was so incredibly sensual that, paradoxically, it completely suppressed any sexual fantasy. I couldn't imagine a man worthy of the setting; if only P.J. O'Rourke were a Democrat, or Al Gore could dance . . . .

Each of us had been scheduled to receive a few spa treatments—various exotically named massages and facials. All the treatments, which normally cost up to

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$80, were completely complimentary. Even when I tried to pay for something—a much-needed haircut, performed in the privacy of my walled villa while I gazed out onto the bay—I couldn't get anyone to give me a bill. All I got were puzzled looks and a Balinese phrase that roughly translated into, "Your money's no good here, cowgirl."

The freebies just kept on coming. Every evening, I returned to my room to find a beautifully wrapped gift lying on my bed, left by some Indonesian hotel version of the tooth fairy. One night, I unwrapped a beautiful batik sarong. On another night, I found a handwrought sterling silver key ring. (All the gifts, of course, were accompanied by press releases about their makers.) Even though I was already accepting thousands of dollars (at retail prices) worth of free transportation, lodging, and food, I felt profoundly uneasy about receiving these expensive little baubles. I could persuade myself that the room and food were really being provided to my magazine, and ultimately, to our readers. But I couldn't quite figure out where the magazine would wear a hand-painted silk scarf.

Show Me the Elephants, Dammit

Sure, everyone in our group went home and wrote relentlessly glowing pieces about the resort. So has every other journalist who's been there, both those on junkets and those whose employers were footing the bills. In paradise, what's not to like? To me, the greatest hazard of the press junket isn't the implicit quid pro quo. It's the controlled and sanitized travel experience it presents to the writers, with everything as perfectly planned and tidily gift-wrapped as those nightly presents left on our pillows. During our trip, we didn't just get first-class accommodations; we got the complete visiting rock star experience. When we went out for our pre-planned whitewater rafting expedition down the Ayung river, the resort's executive chef came along to keep us company.

Unlike some hyperactive travel publicists, our hotel hosts were too sophisticated to try to corral us all into staying on the preordained trip schedule. Instead, if we wished to venture out on our own, they assigned us hotel drivers in hotel vehicles to buffer us from any potentially unpleasant contact with the real world. In our serene boudoirs, there was no indication of the country's political unrest, religious strife or economic turmoil. It was all perfect, in a way that real travel never is, and never should be.

I saw first-hand how easily these junkets can skew writers' visions, turning them into passive, blasé trip consumers who come to resent the inevitable miscues and unexpected adventures of real-life travel. One afternoon, we had the option of heading out into the back country for an elephant ride. I jumped at the chance, and piled into the hotel's waiting Toyota Land Cruiser with our publicist and another woman, a seasoned FAM tripper. As we drove further into the rural areas, we seemed to be moving through a Gauguin painting; deep green hills, purplish mountains, and half-naked young girls bathing unself-consciously in the pools along the roadside.

When we reached the elephant plantation, slightly behind schedule, our publicist marched up to the thatch-roofed ticket counter and demanded our elephants, ASAP. The soft-spoken woman at the desk raised her hands helplessly and explained that she had run out of elephants. Our incensed tour guide waved her reservation sheet in the desk clerk's face. She warned that she was a very important American businesswoman. She thundered that she represented a highly influential hotel chain. She shouted that she was a close personal friend of Dumbo himself. In short, she threw a full-scale New York fit. No elephants resulted. So she skulked around the plantation for a few minutes and then returned to our plush chauffeured Land Cruiser for the journey back through the Garden of Eden. "What a waste," the other writer grumbled, turning away from the view. "I can't believe we missed the shopping trip for this."

The Brother-in-Law Upgrade

It's still hard for me to admit that, after years of never letting my sources buy me lunch, I accepted the monetary equivalent of a good used car. And it's no sop to my conscience that my hosts showered me with luxury in vain. (Sadly, my beloved magazine went out of business before my story ran.)

But, after my brief turn as a junketeer, I don't think the problem is so simple as writers trading falsely fawning stories for the price of an upgrade to concierge level. While it's true that the writers of most junket-based pieces generally sing the praises of their hosts' accommodations, let's face it: Travel publications celebrate travel, especially in its pricier permutations. A travel magazine that advises its readers to just stay home isn't likely to win subscribers—or advertisers.

In some ways, you may be more likely to get the straight scoop from a writer who doesn't have to justify her expense account to her boss when she gets home. One woman in our group told of joining a press trip to a new Florida spa. When she returned, she told her editors it wasn't worth a story. They agreed—a decision that might have been swayed if the magazine had

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just plunked down $2,500 in travel expenses.

Anyway, it's nearly impossible for a publication to keep its travel ethics completely pristine. A number of magazines don't allow free trips, but they do accept special "editorial rates" that can amount to the price of a continental breakfast. And while a few publications do insist on paying full fare, it's difficult to stay out of vexed ethical territory. Consider, for example, the issue of upgrades. Like most frequent travelers, when I'm on the road, I always check for any special low rates and inquire about the possibility of a free upgrade (and I'm not above mentioning the name of my brother-in-law, the airline exec). If a travel writer does the same thing, is that a normal guest request, or a blatant bid for special treatment?

Personally, I don't mind reading magazine stories that bear some of the tell-tale signs of junket travel (such as a reference to "our gracious host, the hotel manager," or a paragraph beginning, "As our United Airlines 747 raced with the sun towards the rosy western sky")—at least not if the article describes a mid-price destination I can afford and might enjoy. That beats some of those lofty newspaper travel sections that refuse all freebies but won't pay the travel expenses of contributing freelance writers. So we end up being treated to tales of impecunious post-grads backpacking from hostel to hostel, or the effusive travel journals of suburban orthodontists' wives.

Yet, even though I can't rev up much moral outrage over the press junket phenomenon, I don't think I'll be taking any more FAM trips any time soon. I can't shake the queasy feeling that my generous hotel hosts might believe they're buying my honor for the price of an otherwise empty villa and a few highly garnished plates of sea bass. I also think we owe our readers the unfeigned enthusiasm for new experiences and exotic locales that we, like them, can achieve only when we get out on the road and fend for ourselves. And, squeamishly, I think we owe them a line somewhere in the piece that explains precisely who was paying for the elephant ride—a line my editors swiftly deleted when I turned in my own Bali memoir.

But I'm keeping the silver key ring. After all, a girl's entitled to her memories. ●

Note: Coming in September, Blake Fleetwood will examine the influence of advertisers on the editorial content of newspapers.

The Washington Monthly

Journalism Award

MAY 1999

LISA GETTER

"U.S. Military Accidents Linked to Flawed Maps"

The Los Angeles Times

When NATO mistakenly bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in May based on a bad map, several newspapers reported that flawed maps had plagued the military before, causing the 1998 accident in which a Marine Corps jet struck an Italian gondola cable. But The Los Angeles Times *revealed that the Belgrade mistake was part of a much longer pattern of fatal errors in maps supplied by the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA). According to the* Times, *the NIMA (which was formed in 1996) and its predecessor agency have suffered from an exodus of senior analysts and cartographers, shortages in congressional funding, and friction between the intelligence and defense communities.*

NEIL A. LEWIS

"A Court Becomes a Model of Conservative Pursuits"

The New York Times

In a comprehensive look at the people and politics of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, Lewis explores the court's "decided shift" to the right over the past decade. Reviewing its rulings on the death penalty, environmental regulation, gay rights, and tobacco, Lewis explains how the court's conservative majority has engaged in "an extaordinary degree of maneuvering to insure that decisions on important cases come out as the majority prefers." The article is important because to a somewhat less dramatic degree, this has been happening in federal courts throughout the country.

THE MONTHLY JOURNALISM AWARD is presented each month to one or more newspaper, magazine, radio, or television stories (or series of stories) that demonstrate a commitment to the public interest. We are particularly interested in reporting that explains the successes and failures of government agencies at all levels and of other institutions such as the media, corporations, unions, and foundations that contribute to the existence or solution of public problems. Please send nominations (including two copies of the article or broadcast text) to The Washington Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Or e-mail us at editors@washingtonmonthly.com. Nominations for stories run in June & July are due August 1.

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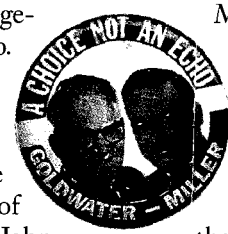
The Running Mates

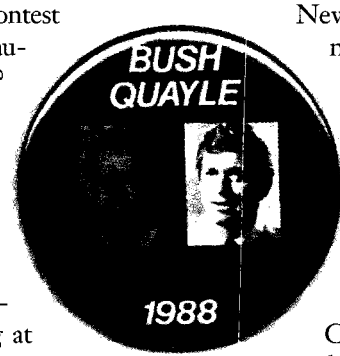
Who will be on the tickets in 2000?

BY ALEXANDRA STARR

"I DO NOT PROPOSE TO BE BURIED UNTIL I am really dead," replied Daniel Webster when he was offered the Whig Vice Presidential nomination in 1848. For much of our nation's history, live entombment has been a largely accurate analogy for the Number Two job. Men who hoped to one day become leader of the free world have found themselves attending funerals, refereeing spelling bees, and playing political errand boy. Few have enjoyed their stint on the peripheries of power; most would probably agree with John Nance Garner's bitter assessment of the position. "The vice presidency," said FDR's first running mate, "isn't worth a pitcher of warm piss."



Ambitious politicians, however, have lusted after the V.P. slot. Remember the dramatic contest between John F. Kennedy and Estes Kefauver to run with Adlai Stevenson in 1956? And who can forget Dan Quayle's unbridled enthusiasm—reminiscent of a kid who had just been tapped to join a college fraternity—when he was introduced as George Bush's running mate? The first impression most Americans had of the future second-in-command was of a breathless man tugging at Bush's sleeve, shouting "Let's get 'em!"



Perhaps Quayle's excitement was justified. After all, more than half a century after Garner made his often-misquoted remark, the veep's job description has changed. Since Jimmy Carter assured Fritz Mondale a weekly luncheon, West Wing office, and access to his own aircraft (Spiro Agnew had to ask permission to be ferried around on what his staff dubbed Air Force 13—a military transport plane without windows), the vice presidency has become more than a spare tire in the automobile of government. Al Gore is the most activist veep in history, serving as head of the Reinventing Government task force, point man on the environment, and occasionally as de facto Secretary of State. "It's not a job where you wait for the president to die anymore," says Matthew Dickenson of Harvard University. "The office has its own sources of power." It can also be a stepping stone to the presidency: Since 1960 every sitting vice president who sought his party's nomination has won it.

As we veer towards the 2000 elections, the choice of who will be a heartbeat away from the presidency is no insignificant matter. There are, however, few clear indications of who will occupy the office. The selection calculus can be inscrutable: Who would have guessed Barry Goldwater would ask William Miller to be his Number Two because the New York Congressman "drove Johnson nuts"? For that matter, who had Gore on their short lists? When Clinton picked a centrist babyboomer from a neighboring state, he threw traditional V.P. selection rules out the window—with impressive results. "1960 was the one year where the vice presidential choice was decisive; Johnson really helped in the south in a tight race," says Charlie Cook of *The Cook Political Report.* "But you could argue that when Clinton chose Gore, the sum was greater than the parts. It was chemistry that worked."

Clinton's choice was perfectly suited to the era of information-based politics, say political strategists. With campaigns essentially conducted via TV screens, it's important for nominees to articulate a clear message, and the vice presidential pick can be a way of reinforcing the candidate's themes. With two young stars on the ticket, the Democrats could legitimately lay claim to the "New Generation" mantle in 1992 and 1996. "When

Campaign buttons courtesy of Ken Rudin

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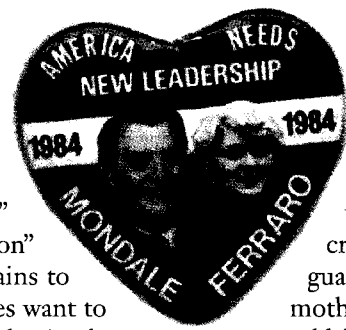
Clinton chose Gore, he called me and said, 'The message is going to be the changing of the guard,'" says Al From, chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council. "Voters connected with that."

Traditionally, presidential nominees haven't used the veep choice to expand on the campaign's image so much as to "balance" the ticket and preferably lure a certain demographic to the polls. It was never a surefire approach. Michael Dukakis, liberal governor of Massachusetts, played it by the book when he tapped Lloyd Bentsen, centrist-conservative senator of Texas, to be his running mate. (The campaign had a dreamy eye on the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, what Dukakis called the Boston-Austin connection, where geography tipped the election.) Pitifully few Americans thought Dan Quayle was better qualified to be vice president than Bentsen. But Bush won the election decisively; a reminder, perhaps, that people vote for the president, not his running mate. On the demographic front, Geraldine Ferraro didn't bring a surge of women voters to the Democratic ticket in 1984 (she didn't even carry her home state, New York). Nor did Dan Quayle prove a seductive poster boy for baby-boomers (in fact, he may have reduced Bush's margin of victory).



Whether the 2000 presidential nominees adhere to an "amplification" (e.g., Clinton and Gore) or "diversification" (e.g., Dukakis and Bentsen) strategy remains to be seen. Ultimately, presidential nominees want to tap someone who will help them win the election but could also be a plausible president. As the Quayle choice demonstrated, ignoring the qualifications of the veep in the hopes of attracting a certain demographic to the ticket can backfire. "The feeling is, if you're a serious candidate for the presidency, you pick a serious running mate," says Tom Mann of the Brookings Institution.

With the election more than a year and a half away, it is undoubtedly early to be speculating who will be second on the ticket. We were taken to task for jumping the gun. ("I cannot believe you are playing these *games*," said Mann. "And I am *appalled* I am playing these games with you!") But for what it's worth, here are his and other political intelligentsia members' vice presidential picks, in no particular order.

The Democrats:

(assuming Al Gore is the nominee)

Evan Bayh: Bayh is a virtual Gore clone. Both are sons of prominent senators who were elected to the Senate in their own right (Bayh is the offspring of liberal senator Birch Bayh of Indiana; Gore's namesake was a long-time senator from Tennessee). Like Gore, Bayh has staked out a middle-of-the-road position—his tight fiscal spending policies earned him the moniker "Republicrat" during his two-terms as Indiana's governor. His moderate politics played well in the heavily-Republican state, and he left the governorship in 1997 with an astounding 79 percent approval rating. The 43-year old, who has long been viewed as a rising star in the Democratic party, gave a keynote address at the 1996 Convention. His speech didn't make much of a splash (then again, Clinton's 1988 snoozer didn't either). Still, Bayh isn't known for his charismatic presence, which could be a significant drawback in light of the probable presidential nominee. It's also unclear whether Bayh could carry his home state in the 2000 elections—the last Democrat to win Indiana was Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

Bill Richardson: Until the Energy Department spy scandal surfaced earlier this year, Richardson would have topped everyone's Democratic vice presidential list. The bilingual son of an Anglo father and Mexican mother, Richardson's Hispanic credentials could help Gore with Latinos. That could be particularly useful if Bush is the Republican nominee; Hispanics comprise the fastest growing portion of the electorate, and George W. has proven apt at wooing them in Texas. Richardson's overseas troubleshooting missions on behalf of the Clinton administration garnered heavy media attention, and when he negotiated the release of two Americans imprisoned in Iraq in 1995 he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. After a stint at the United Nations, Richardson took the top job at the Department of Energy (DOE) last year. Oil, gas, and uranium interests are major players in New Mexico, and Richardson reportedly thought the position could serve as a springboard for a gubernatorial run in his homestate. Unfortunately for the Energy Secretary, the long-festering spy scandal at DOE labs erupted on his watch. Depending on

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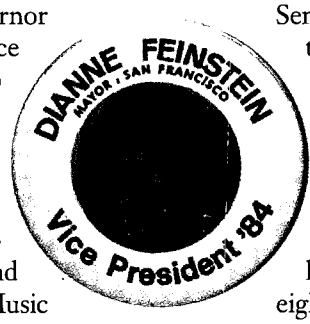
how he handles the fall-out, he could still make it on the ticket, but his prospects are dimmer.

Zell Miller: A former marine and two-term Georgia governor, Miller would certainly spice up a Democratic ticket. He electrified the Democratic National Convention in 1992 when he described the Bush-Perot-Clinton lineup as "a race between an aristocrat, an autocrat, and a Democrat." And charisma isn't all he brings to the table: By the time he left the governor's mansion in 1998, Miller had created the most comprehensive college scholarship program in the country and established pre-kindergarten education for Georgia's four-year olds. *Governing* magazine named Miller one of its 1998 public officials of the year, commending the former governor for phasing out antiquated civil service rules that made it all but impossible to fire sub-par workers. The 38-year veteran of state government also embarked on smaller, quixotic campaigns in his gubernatorial tenure. Intrigued by studies suggesting that early exposure to classical music improves a child's creative and analytical skills, Miller persuaded Sony Music Corp. to distribute free tapes to Georgian babies and provided copies of *The Little Engine That Could* (a seminal childhood influence) to Georgia's preschoolers. While Georgia has become increasingly conservative, Miller was a very popular governor, and he could carry the state. At 67, however, he wouldn't project a youthful image, and some political analysts say his chance to be a national standard bearer has come and gone.



Longer shots:

Diane Feinstein: Before the Democrats won decisively in California's gubernatorial election, Sen. Feinstein had a much better chance of nabbing the Number Two slot. Her chances would improve considerably if Republicans put Elizabeth Dole on the ticket (the GOP convention takes place before the Democrats', and Gore could feel pressured to neutralize Dole's presence). A sponsor of the assault weapons ban, Feinstein has established a reputation as a moderate and able legislator in the Senate. But she can come off as abrasive, and her husband Richard Blum's business deals have raised questions of impropriety (hmmm, remember Ferraro in '84?).

Jeanne Shaheen: New Hampshire's governor, dubbed by one pundit as "the world's most composed redhead," could also counter a Bush-Dole ticket. Shaheen won election in conservative New Hampshire by championing a statewide kindergarten program and increased surveillance of HMOs. She also garnered plaudits for raising emergency funds for New Hampshire's public schools without imposing a state income tax. Shaheen already has a connection to the Gore operation: Her husband, William, is running the vice president's New Hampshire campaign. But Shaheen is little known outside of her state, and many voters would probably surmise she was put on the ticket purely because of her gender.

Joe Lieberman: The only Orthodox Jew in the Senate, Lieberman has cultivated a reputation for personal integrity, and he was one of Clinton's fiercest critics in the Monica Lewinsky scandal. A champion of defense interests and "V-chips" for parents to block out TV programs that have objectionable material for kids, he's regarded as a moderate and conscientious lawmaker. Connecticut brings a whopping eight electoral votes, however, and if Clinton has a veto over Gore's running mate, he may not look fondly on the man who delivered a blistering floor speech criticizing the President's behavior.

Bill Bradley: Al Gore's sole challenger for the nomination, Bradley is one of the more unusual personalities on the political landscape. The former Rhodes scholar, star forward for the Knicks, and three-term New Jersey senator would make sense geographically (New Jersey is a swing state). But if the primaries get nasty, his chances of landing a spot on the ticket are slim.

Bob Kerrey: A telegenic war hero (he lost part of his right leg in Vietnam and was awarded the Medal of Honor), the second-term Nebraska senator and former governor has long been bandied about as a national candidate. His relationship with actress Debra Winger made him something of a dashing figure and helped him tap into Hollywood coffers in his unsuccessful 1992 bid for the Democratic presidential nomination. On policy issues, Kerrey has been a leading advocate for health care reform and reining in entitlement spending. But the senator doesn't shy away from criticizing his fellow Democrats, and Gore might not trust him to be a team player.

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The Republicans:
(assuming George W. Bush is the nominee)

Tom Ridge: The Pennsylvania governor, former congressman, and Vietnam vet would seem a natural Number Two. Pennsylvania is a swing state, and the GOP would love to lay claim to its 23 electoral votes. Ridge, who has a hearing problem which was aggravated in Vietnam, was overwhelmingly reelected to a second gubernatorial term in 1998 and is personally close to Bush. In the House, Ridge represented the heavily blue-collar Erie district and earned one of the highest ratings from labor unions on the Republican side of the aisle, although he supported GOP tax and immigration initiatives. As governor, Ridge has carefully hewed to the middle, cutting taxes on businesses and the working poor, deregulating the electric industry, and brokering a deal with insurance companies to lower workers' compensation rates. In an era where "inclusiveness" is a buzz word, Ridge has covered his bases, appointing the first minority woman to co-chair the Republican state committee. Ridge is pro-choice, but he champions every abortion restriction imaginable, so he could still pass muster with the more conservative wings of the Republican party. If he's tapped, Ridge's coronation would occur on his home turf—Philadelphia is hosting the 2000 Republican convention.

John McCain: The maverick Arizona Republican is shooting for the presidential nomination, but people have been floating his name for the veep slot, too. McCain's compelling background as a POW in Vietnam, forthright manner, and against-the-grain stands on campaign finance and tobacco legislation have earned high marks from media types. "He's the media's favorite because he thinks like they do on certain issues," says Ken Rudin, political editor at National Public Radio. "But his stands on campaign finance and tobacco make him anathema to the Republican leadership. Plus, he has a very hot temper, and there is a fear in the Republican party that he could fly off the handle in a debate or on the campaign trail." Still, McCain's foreign policy credentials could flesh out a Bush ticket. While a Bush-McCain team wouldn't make sense geographically, neither did Clinton-Gore in 1992. "I think at this point, it's the Republicans' best ticket," says Rudin.

Elizabeth Dole: Nothing is supposed to rile Sugar Lips more than the accusation she is running for Vice President. (This may be partially due to the fact she has heard her husband grouse about being wrongfully blamed for Gerald Ford's 1976 presidential loss when Dole ran as Ford's Number Two.) But Elizabeth Dole, who has never held elected office, is a more credible candidate for the vice presidency than leader of the free world. "She has the most important qualification for a vice presidential candidate," says Stu Rothenberg of the *Rothenberg Political Report*. "She smiles nicely." Aside from her pearly whites, Dole's chief assets are her last name and her XX chromosomes—and for a party that has had its problems wooing female voters, putting a woman on the ticket could narrow the gender gap. But Dole's pro-life stance could alienate a chunk of the soccer moms she is supposed to lure to the GOP side, and female candidates do not automatically pull in the female vote (just ask Geraldine Ferraro, who ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic Senate nomination in New York last year, or Jane Harman, who was creamed in the Democratic primary of the 1998 California gubernatorial race). If Dole runs well in the primaries, however, she could become the GOP's poster girl.

Longer Shots:

George Pataki: New York's governor ended speculation he would run for the presidency himself when he endorsed Bush this spring. His announcement effectively delivered the New York primary to the Texan, and Pataki is clearly gunning for a position on the ticket. As governor of New York, he is by definition a potential candidate, but a "two Georges" ticket seems unlikely. Pataki is hardly colorful, registered Democrats outnumber Republicans 5 to 3 in New York, and his pro-choice views on abortion could rankle the conservative wing of the GOP. Still, Pataki did win re-election handily, and a Bush-Pataki ticket

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would force the Democrats to spend money in what should be a safe state—draining their resources for swing states.

Chuck Hagel: The first-term Senator from Nebraska and decorated Vietnam vet is in many ways the quintessential Washington insider. After working as a Republican Hill staffer and making a mint in the cellular phone industry, Hagel considered running for office in Virginia but opted instead to throw his hat in the ring in his home state. His conservative record and foreign policy expertise could help shore

Who's Who

By Susan Threadgill

One of our favorite stories involves the late **Marvella Bayh**, whose son **Evan** is a senator from Indiana, a seat that had previously belonged to her husband, **Birch**. When she got the news that her husband had been declared the winner of his first senate race, she exclaimed, "Daddy this means we get to go to Europe!" That's all the background you need to understand the news that Senators **Richard Shelby**, **Ted Stevens**, and **Ben Nighthorse Campbell** and their wives attended the Paris Air Show last month as the official representatives of the United States Senate.

They say **Al Gore** can't pick Energy Secretary **Bill Richardson** as his vice presidential running mate because of the Chinese spy scandal. But how much hay is **George W. Bush** going to be able to make out of that scandal—which, after all, went on undetected for the four years his father occupied the White House?

The causes we share with **Steve Forbes** are few, but there is one matter in which we agree. He says the new $20 bill looks like "Monopoly money" and promises to replace it. Why on earth did **Robert Rubin** and **Larry Summers** give us such dubious-looking currency?

Speaking of **Al Gore**, here's what **Dick Morris** has to say about his choice of campaign manager: "Vice President Al Gore has selected the former skipper of the Titanic to save his sinking presidential campaign. **Tony Coelho** ... earned this amazing promotion after masterminding the Democratic Party's most massive defeat in 50 years—the 1994 loss of the House and the Senate."

When Republican presidential hopeful, Sen. **Robert C. Smith** asked a luncheon audience for questions after his speech to the conservative Federalist Society, someone inquired about Smith's views on **Bill Lann Lee**, the acting head of the Justice Department's civil rights division who is high on the conservatives' most unpopular public officials list. Smith replied, according to *Slate*, with an indignant denunciation of the Energy Department security lapses. They should have kept a closer watch on the fellow, Smith said, concluding that people were saying "the bombing in Kosovo was designed to distract the public's attention from the Bill Lann Lee matter." Smith appears to have thought that Bill Lann Lee was **Wen Ho Lee**, the scientist suspected of having leaked nuclear secrets to China.

When Republicans took control of the House of Representatives in 1995, they enacted a six-year limit on committee chairmanships. This has become a matter of the deepest regret to the 11 committee chairman who will have to surrender their chairs after the next election. They include Bill Clinton's pal **Henry Hyde** (Judiciary), tax foe **Bill Archer** (Ways and Means), and tobacco advocate **Thomas Bliley** (Commerce). The chairmen are not, however, going quietly into the night. Most are said to be plotting to preserve their essential powers. Transportation Committee Chair **Bud Shuster**, for example, "will likely take over a recently formed subcommittee with consolidated oversight of all highway and rail matters," according to *The Wall Street Journal*'s **Greg Hitt**.

Now that the recent conflict in Yugoslavia has cast doubt on **Tom Friedman**'s dictum that countries with McDonald's don't go to war, *The New York Times* columnist has substituted Starbucks for McDonald's. He now says, "A country with a middle class willing to pay $3 for a cup of coffee with foam on it is much less likely to go to war with its neighbors."

Speaking of **Bud Shuster**, his dear friend **Ann Eppard**, who

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up Bush with the right, but George W. wouldn't need any help in Nebraska.

Fred Thompson: The Tennessee Republican's star power has dimmed since his congressional hearings on malfeasance in Clinton-Gore fundraising came to naught. But the former Hollywood actor-turned-senator is a telegenic presence and a master fundraiser. His folksy (some would say carefully calculated) style has played well in Tennessee, and holding Gore's feet to the fire in his home state could force the vice president to spend time and money on his home turf. ©

has been indicted by a federal grand jury for taking payoffs while working as Shuster's aide, has continued to rake in "hundreds of thousands of dollars in lobbying fees," according to **Lorraine Adams** of *The Washington Post*, from clients "seeking to capitalize on her access to Shuster and her decades-deep knowledge of the committee." Adams adds that Eppard has continued to serve as Shuster's chief fund-raiser, remaining on the campaign payroll at $3000 a month.

Who was pulling the strings behind **Dan Quayle**'s recent attack on **George W. Bush**'s "compassionate conservatism"? *Texas Monthly* says the pupeteer was **John Sununu**, the co-chairman of Quayle's presidential campaign, who blames George W. for his 1991 dismissal as President Bush's chief of staff. A friend of George W.'s told the magazine "Sununu is exactly that petty and exactly that stupid."

If you live around here, you've probably spent hours fuming in traffic in front of the Wilson Bridge, which carries Washington Beltway traffic across the Potomac River between Virginia and Maryland. *The Washington Post* has run more than 20 editorials advocating a new drawbridge to ease the traffic. But it has stopped mentioning that the main reason an expensive new drawbridge is needed is to permit the passage of ships loaded with newsprint. Guess who uses the newsprint? The *Post*, of course. Why did it stop revealing its interest? "We had it on record adequately and fully for some period of time," says **Stephen Rosenfeld**, who recently replaced the late **Meg Greenfield** as editor of the *Post*'s editorial page. "It was no longer an issue."

Cynics suspect that the *Post* doesn't want its readers reminded that most of those hideous traffic jams that torment Beltway motorists when the drawbridge is up are caused by *The Washington Post*. Not to mention that *Post* readers who are also taxpayers will be paying for the new bridge.

We owe that item to the *Washingtonian*'s **Chuck Conconi** and **Harry Jaffe**. And we are indebted to the *Washingtonian*'s **Vivian Ronay** for our photograph of **Eleanor Mondale** which we publish in the interests of fuller explanation of why **Monica Lewinsky** created that mini riot when a White House guard told her that Mondale was in **Bill Clinton**'s office. Our only question is, what did **Hillary** do when she found out?

When things were looking bad for the administration in Kosovo, Senate Majority Leader **Trent Lott** asked his fellow Republicans to sign a letter calling for the resignation of National Security Advisor **Sandy Berger**. But, according to *The Hill*, he was able to get only 17 signatures and decided to abandon the effort. Among the cooler heads who refused to sign and were said to have influenced others: **John McCain**, **Richard Shelby**, **Chuck Hagel**, and **John Chafee**.

Here's a Who's Who exclusive. If **Hillary Clinton** lives in New York it's not likely the First Couple will see much of one another. **Bill Clinton**, of course, will have to spend some time at his library in Little Rock. But most of all, he is said by a very reliable source to be looking longingly at the possibility of residing in Southern California. (Maybe he's still wondering what it would be like with **Sharon Stone**.)

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Clueless in the Capital

Reporters get the right story wrong—and academics tune out

BY DONALD F. KETTL

IN MAY 1996, VALUJET FLIGHT 592, ITS cabin full of smoke and its crew struggling to maintain control, spiraled out of the sky and into the Everglades. The crash claimed 110 lives and sparked intense soul-searching: How could such a thing have happened?

"Dateline NBC," after a three-month investigation, devoted much of its May 9, 1997 show to providing an answer. Reporter Chris Hansen concluded "our government did not do enough to protect us. It failed to implement the recommendations of its safety experts. It failed to warn us about dangers it knew of well before the crash. And one year after Flight 592 crashed here in the Florida everglades, it has failed to make sure that a similar accident cannot happen again." The segment then presented an interview with a former FAA official who bluntly argued, "I would probably favor listing the FAA as directly causing the accident."

That, however, was far from the whole story. ValuJet had long been a troubled airline. It had flown with broken or missing equipment, and it had suffered a string of mishaps, including an engine that burst into flames before takeoff and planes that overran runways on three separate occasions. In the case of Flight 592, the fire was caused by highly volatile oxygen generators—canisters that supply oxygen to passengers "in the unlikely event of a loss of cabin pressure," as the boarding announcements say. The airline's maintenance contractor had mislabeled them as empty, had failed to install required safety caps, and then failed to pack them properly for shipment. A spark started a fire, and the oxygen generators quickly turned it into a smoky inferno that brought down the plane. The immediate cause of the crash, in other words, was the failure of both a private-sector airline and its private-sector contractor to follow government rules already on the books.

The same thing happened when "CBS This Morning" investigated the 1993 outbreak of food poisoning in Oregon "Jack-in-the-Box" hamburger restaurants. Co-host Paula Zahn asked, "So who is to blame for this food poisoning?" Her guest, Tom Devine from the Government Accountability Project, replied simply, "For the last decade, the Department of Agriculture has been gutting its food-inspection program and the bureaucrats have been asking for it." In fact, however, the outbreak occurred because the restaurants failed to cook the burgers thoroughly.

In both cases, the government surely could have done a much better job. Post-crash investigations pointed to the FAA's problems in regulating the safety of start-up airlines. The USDA has struggled for years to improve its "sniff-and-poke" meat inspection system. Turning up the heat improves the odds that government will focus more on such important issues. In both cases, though, it made a better television story to pin the entire blame on the government. The "gotcha" got the air time, and in the process an important part of the story was lost: the difficulty of equipping government to deal with fast-changing conditions in the private sector, and the private sector's reluctance to abide by the rules.

Switch to the academic side of the street. The Clinton administration has been trying to reinvent the federal government since early in 1993. New ideas, from customer service to employee empowerment, have flooded out of Vice President Gore's office. When asked about which academics they relied on for insights, though, Elaine Kamarck, Gore's senior domestic policy adviser, paused, thought carefully, and replied, "Well, really—none."

These vignettes sketch a recurring problem. When it comes to what government really does, the news media often latch onto exactly the right story in

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precisely the wrong way. The real stories are often far more complex, much more textured, and infinitely more interesting than what television, in particular, can easily capture. Academics, especially those whose job it is to think about how to make government work better, often miss what government is really doing. In their search for academic respectability and career-enhancing breakthroughs, they tend to write for each other and to avoid the hot-button stories altogether. As a result, when a story like the ValuJet crash breaks, the full explanation sometimes never emerges—and the underlying causes of the problem are that much more likely to linger.

The Scandal Chase

"It's all consistent with covering politics as a game, a forum for celebrity life, and a place for scandal," explains Thomas Mann, director of the Brookings Institution's Governmental Studies Program. Journalists seldom produce stories about government working well, he notes, unless it's a lonely bureaucrat battling the system. The media, both broadcast and print, are far more likely to produce stories about screwups and scandal than in-depth reports about how things work and how they could work better.

For example, when *The Washington Post* poked around the FDA's drug-approval process in a March 23 article, it led with the tale of Jo Ann Ottmers. She eagerly took a new diabetes medicine, but the drug made her nauseated and weak before damaging her liver. Ms. Ottmers underwent a liver transplant and sued Warner-Lambert, the drug's manufacturer. Such tales, the *Post* suggested, underlined a "debate that is raging over the safety of medicines that millions of Americans take every day." Yet the story later revealed that the FDA was approving more drugs than ever before, in half the time as before, at the same historic rate of 2 to 3 percent of drugs later withdrawn for problems. Thus, the scandal served to obscure another, larger story: The FDA had managed to speed up its drug approval process dramatically without increasing the rate of problem drugs.

Stephen Hess, longtime observer of the Washington media, is fond of quoting Dame Rebecca West: "Journalism is the ability to meet the challenge of filling space." The space has expanded, the challenge has grown, and the lure of "gotcha" stories has exploded. With TV newsmagazine shows airing virtually every night of the week, the rise of 24-hour-a-day cable news, and the print media struggling to find their way in the electronic information age, there is far more space to fill. In the heat of tough competition, viewers and readers are harder to attract and keep. That's fueled personality-based "gotcha" stories, grounded in scandal—the "up-close-and-personal" approach designed to grab headlines.

It's not that the private sector doesn't also suffer from bureaucracy problems—after all, "bureaucracy" is a generic term for how large organizations, public and private, behave. But private companies can hide their mistakes far more easily than the government can, because they aren't subject to the same legal requirements for openness. Where the government's "waste, fraud and abuse" is fodder for investigations by reporters, watchdog groups, and congressional committees, similar mistakes and sins by private companies are far more likely to escape the public eye. Retailers bury shoplifting costs in higher prices and credit-card fraud in higher interest rates. Government tends to deal with society's hardest problems, operates in areas with greater risk, and works in the spotlight. There's a greater chance for bad things to happen and little chance that bad news will escape media attention.

The result, as Elaine Kamarck explains, is a "negativity bias" toward government: a mismatched sense of the private sector's virtue and the government's vice. And because the presumption of poor government performance is so widespread, Kamarck explains, it's hard for most reporters to believe that government could have done something right. When good things happen, therefore, they look for something else that could account for it. The result is a distorted public view of government agencies: Government isn't as bad as news stories usually suggest; private companies often aren't as well-managed as their carefully cultivated images suggest.

Moreover, the "news hole" for government stories has shrunk as the negativity bias has increased. Government news stories on "ABC World News Tonight" dropped from 40.2 percent of all stories in 1977 to 15.9 percent in 1997, according to a survey by the Committee of Concerned Journalists. On the "CBS Evening News," the drop was from 38.9 to 18.7 percent. "NBC Nightly News" cut its government coverage from 32.7 to 18.5 percent. In two major newspapers—*The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*—government coverage remained about the same. But in *Time* and *Newsweek*, government stories plummeted. In 1997, in fact, *Time*'s government coverage was just one-fourth that in 1977.

As coverage has shrunk, personal-interest stories have driven much of what remains, especially on TV newsmagazines. These shows are popular with network executives, because they cost about half as much to

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produce as hour-long dramatic shows and have consistently won high ratings. When news happens, the magazines can quickly incorporate fresh segments and bring the personal touch to stories like plane crashes and political squabbles. As mainline TV shows have fallen in the ratings or consistent winners like "Seinfeld" have gone off the air, replacing them with newsmagazines has been the model. In fact, as "60 Minutes" executive producer Don Hewitt has been quoted as saying, "Behind every new newsmagazine is a failed sitcom."

The proliferation of newsmagazines has produced an insatiable demand for new segments, especially because they rarely broadcast reruns. Large numbers of producers chase a small number of stories on the same topic. The result, some producers complain, is pressure to oversimplify and hype stories to grab viewers. "Dateline NBC," for example, entitled its story on long work hours for truck drivers (and whether government ought to impose tougher regulations) "trucker's killing fields." The newsmagazines focus on scandals, preferably with a real-person angle, because they have only seconds to grab the viewers' attention before they reach for the remote control.

Add to that a much shorter news cycle. A 1999 *American Journalism Review* study by reporters John Herbers and James McCartney found that, with the rise of CNN, stories have become far more condensed. Reporters once would have taken one day to report the story, the next to gather reactions, and the third to produce background analysis. CNN produces all three within minutes, and that pressures everyone else in the business to keep up or get squeezed out.

Nothing shows the shifting sense of what's news more than *National Journal*. The magazine was founded in 1969 by alumni of *Congressional Quarterly* in an effort to provide the public with better coverage of the executive branch. In 1979, it featured articles on acquired tastes like federal loan programs and nuclear power plant safety. Twenty years later, the magazine had shifted to politics. Articles in early 1999 explored topics like a "March muddle" for the GOP and "invasion of the lobby snatchers." Washington's premier inside-government magazine had become a journal of political analysis. As its political coverage rose, analysis of government administration shrank—virtually to the vanishing point.

The same thing has happened to daily newspapers' coverage of government. Herbers and McCartney found that the Department of Veteran's Affairs, once covered full-time by a number of news agencies and papers, is now covered by only two. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is down to one. And the Interior Department, which controls 500 million acres of public land, oversees four major agencies, and is involved daily in all kinds of hotly contested environmental and land-use issues, does not have a single reporter covering it full-time.

To some extent, these changes reflect constructive reforms in the way papers cover political issues. In the past, it was far too common for reporters assigned to a particular department to stand around waiting for handouts, producing redundant and often shallow stories. Nowadays cross-coverage is far more common, with single reporters covering several agencies on say, a health or national security beat. Yet the tendency to miss out on less sexy government stories is undeniable. Last fall *The Washington Post*'s Bill McAllister noticed an important change in the way the Department of Veterans' Affairs was making decisions. For the first time in decades, the department was showing a willingness to close some of its obsolete or redundant hospitals. Initially the story was slated for the front page. But it lost out to the Lewinsky scandal and a variety of other local, business and international stories. Finally it ran on page A15.

This national trend mirrors shifts in how the media cover state and local governments. Since the '70s, the ratings chase has driven local TV stations to increase "news you can use" and "fighting the bureaucracy" stories—and it's worked. The day-to-day business of government gets little coverage except from scandals and the police and fire blotters. In state capitals, wire services and leading newspapers have reduced their reporting staffs even as devolution has sent more power to the state houses. In Michigan, for example, the *Detroit News* cut its statehouse bureau from six reporters to four, and United Press International closed its three-person Lansing bureau. Connecticut's capitol press corps is just half of what it was a decade ago. Across the country, only 513 reporters cover state government full-time, along with 113 wire-service reporters. That compares with 3,000 media credentials issued for last year's Superbowl. As Paul Klite, executive director of the Rocky Mountain Media Watch, said of a national survey of local television news, "most local TV newscasts have abandoned the public interest in the race for ratings." Some bars in Los Angeles even offer happy-hour prices on drinks if helicopter cameras are tracking a police chase.

Producers and editors have discovered mayhem as a profit center. It works because that's what viewers watch and readers read. In 1997, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press analyzed which stories Americans had paid the most attention to in

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the previous decade. Disasters and personal-interest stories, from the Challenger explosion to a little girl in Texas caught in a well, topped the list. Complicated political news, like the debates over campaign finance and global warming, fell to the bottom.

These patterns seem to apply in other countries too. "Daily Focus," a 15-minute TV news magazine, attracts 300 million daily fans, with in-depth stories on white-collar crime and corruption—in China.

The Effects on Government

What difference does this all make? In part, a negative image of government and its employees undermines citizen trust in public institutions, undermines the morale of government workers, and discourages the best and brightest from seeking government careers. An extensive Council for Excellence in Government study of how government workers and their institutions appear on prime-time TV—a survey of 9,588 characters seen from 1955 through 1998—showed that government has gotten a black eye and that the trend is getting worse. Teachers and law enforcers generally get positive treatment, but otherwise, "television takes public officials and civil servants and turns them into politicians and bureaucrats who serve their own interest or special interests rather than the public interest." On "Seinfeld," Newman did everything possible to avoid delivering the mail—except when there was a chance he might win a transfer to Hawaii or earn ten-cent refunds on recycled soft-drink cans. University of Wisconsin-Madison researcher Anne Hamilton found that although people like government services and the people who provide them, they deeply distrust faceless and anonymous "bureaucrats" and "bureaucracies."

The scandal chase has also meant that reporters, in their zealous pursuit of what has gone wrong, aren't seeking the story of what might go wrong. Such reporting could nip scandals in the bud before they become juicy fodder for Pulitzer prizes. Think of how the S&L scandal that cost the nation over $100 billion could have been prevented or minimized if reporters had been probing for warning signs.

And think of the Challenger disaster. The shuttle exploded in midair in January 1986 while millions of Americans watched in horror on television. Soon afterward, the story of how it could have been prevented began to emerge—thanks more to whistleblowers at NASA and Morton Thiokol (its private sector contractor) than to the press. Front-line engineers at Thiokol had been worried for months that cold weather might prevent the solid rocket motors' gaskets from sealing properly, putting the shuttle in grave danger. They pressed their case with middle-level managers, to the point of a shouting match with both NASA and contractor managers the night before the fatal launch. But the top officials in charge never heard the full story. Why? Because after a number of embarassing delays, they didn't want to hear any more excuses, no matter how real. The agency had already sped up its launch schedule, thanks to competition with the European Ariane rocket and the Reagan administration's desire to see NASA run like a private company. Thiokol was worried about losing its shuttle contract. And NASA was eager to have the launch occur in time for President Reagan to point proudly to Christa McAuliffe, the public school teacher in space, during his State of the Union address. When Thiokol engineers recommended postponement to NASA's George Hardy, he said he was appalled and asked them to make another recommendation. In effect, he was telling them "I don't want to hear about it."

When it comes to what government does, the news media often latch onto exactly the right story in precisely the wrong way.

Worries about the shuttle program were well-known in the space community. If reporters had been looking carefully at the risks, the dangers would have become more well-known to the public—and NASA would not have dared to ignore them.

The obsession with scandal makes it even harder for government officials to get their stories out. Not only are there fewer reporters covering government, they're less likely to have experience on the beat and less likely to jump into a story unless it's already hot. Sometimes reporters in D.C. only move on a story after regional papers have covered it. In their survey for *American Journalism Review*, Herbers and McCartney found that Washington officials often bypass Washington reporters to talk with newsmen at regional papers, knowing that their story may get more play this way. "We'd rather appear in the *Washington Post*

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through AP, coming from the outside," one senior Interior Department official told Herbers and McCartney.

It's true, as Michael McCurry argues elsewhere in this issue, that for anyone willing to look and especially for anyone with a computer, there's never been more information available on government and its operations. Yet this blizzard of information often magnifies the problems caused by the decline of reporters who understand the core issues. Fresh to a story and swamped with information, the instinct of most reporters is to reach for the cult of scandal and celebrity.

For a sense of what the government is and what it does, therefore, it's both the best of times and the worst of times. The major media have dumbed down their coverage and produced less of it. Despite the flood of new information out there, it's harder to separate news from spin and scandal from news.

Just the Science, Ma'am

Academics' analysis of government administration—and government's reliance on academics for advice about how to make it work better—has changed just as fundamentally. A generation ago, government officials never would have thought about making major administrative changes without convening a brain trust of top academics. Indeed, a tightly connected group of leading scholars came to Washington during World War II to help structure the war effort, shaped the two Hoover Commission reports that defined post-war government administration, and provided the "whiz kids" that drove the Kennedy administration.

A strange thing happened soon after, though—most academics' phones stopped ringing. The Reagan and Bush administrations relied heavily on the Heritage and Cato think tanks for ideas ranging from privatization plans to downsizing initiatives. But these weren't typical academics. The analysts had a clear ideological point of view and a strategy for working Washington's corridors for power. They produced policy briefs and how-to guides for conservatives trying to transform the government. At the state level, conservative think tanks like the Hudson Institute shaped welfare reform. Intellectuals played a powerful role, but rarely were they university-based academics.

The Clinton administration's "reinventing government" campaign only confirmed the trend. Its guidebook was David Osborne and Ted Gaebler's best-seller *Reinventing Government*—a book written by a journalist and a former city manager that transformed the way top officials thought about government. The book relied on ideas about customer service from the private sector, the path-breaking reforms in New Zealand's government, and extensive reporting on what state and local governments were doing. They paid almost no attention, though, to the last century's scholarly work in public administration.

How could academics have slipped, in just one generation, from the go-to authorities on government administration to sideline players? There are two answers. First, public administrationists had helped found political science at the turn of the century, but by the '50s their commonsense approach was eclipsed by political science's search for a stronger scientific base. Second, as public policy schools grew in leading universities around the country, students and practitioners created a different approach—public management—that shared little with public administration. That pushed public administration into an intellectual backwater from which it has been struggling for a generation to escape.

Blind Spot

It isn't as though academia had ignored government altogether. In the past few decades public policy programs have sprung up all around the country, from Harvard's Kennedy School and Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School to the LBJ School at the University of Texas and the Harris School at the University of Chicago. These schools are multi-disciplinary, with economists and political scientists joining sociologists, lawyers, and engineers, among others. Their mission is to find out how to make better policy choices, how to know whether programs are working, and how managers can produce results.

But the old-fashioned practice of observing government administration in action gave way, in these new schools, to the sexier job of dreaming up new programs and designing statistical and theoretical models to see how such programs might work. The hot approach was microeconomics, which uses mathematically complex formulas to determine the most efficient way for a business or government agency to spend its money. This kind of theory can be useful. But it only takes you so far in a world where political realities interfere with the best-run markets. It's one thing, for example, to create an elaborate market-trading scheme that rewards companies for reducing the amount of pollution they emit. It's quite another to create and administer the market to make it work—and to determine whether the scheme really makes the environment any cleaner and improves anyone's health.

At worst, these highly formal approaches can drift away from reality altogether. In the early '80s some

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scholars developed elaborate theoretical models to explain and predict the decisions of Federal Reserve officers. Although they showed an impressive knowledge of the Fed's decisions and an undeniable analyltical elegance, as a predictive tool the models were useless and, to the Fed officials who saw them, laughable.

Another approach that gained ground in academia was known as "public management." Unlike public administration, which focused on processes (like budgeting and personnel) and structure (like organization and hierarchy), public management concentrated on people. The book titles of some of the movement's leading thinkers sketch the approach: "leadership counts" (by Robert D. Behn) as a tool for "breaking through bureaucracy" (Michael Barzelay). Leadership does indeed count. The trick lies in figuring out how to wire leadership into the enduring processes and structures that make bureaucracy work.

The older, observation-based approach didn't die out completely. In the '70s, a group of scholars began writing analyses of why government programs went wrong, dubbing their approach "implementation." Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky wrote the most famous book, *Implementation.* In its subtitle, the authors pledged to explain "how great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland; or, why it's amazing that federal programs work at all." From urban renewal to job training, the case studies proliferated. They were richly detailed and fun to read, but in the end they suffered the same problems as the TV newsmagazines: It was hard to tell if they got the story right, if they were telling the right story, and if their lessons could be generalized to other problems. In the end, implementation lost out to the more fashionable specialties, ensuring that the academy would stay behind the curve on the government's day-to-day business.

Combine these threads and the implications are clear. Policy-makers and many academics have dismissed public administration for being quaint and out of touch. But the abstract approach favored in much cutting-edge scholarship offers little help to people out in the trenches trying to make government programs work better. As a result, government managers have tended to draw inspiration from journalists' accounts (like Osborne and Gaebler), private-sector lessons (like re-engineering and customer service), foreign experiences (like New Zealand and the United Kingdom), and from their own front-line battles. They relied on few academics for ideas—and in turn, few academics paid much attention to them.

Asking the Right Questions

Academia's difficulties in grappling with government have only deepened in the past decade. While the realities of government shifted radically with devolution, privatization, reinvention, and welfare reform, scholars continued to build on earlier academic models, learning more and more about less and less. Scholars have too often defined their research problems by the questions that others have already asked. They have answered them with data others have already collected. Messy problems that require extensive data collection have tended to slip off the agenda. As Kennedy School scholar Steven Kelman points out, on many critical questions, from procurement reform to devolution, "there are no existing data sets—and because people don't gather their own data, they don't study this." It's an academic reenactment of the old joke: "Why are you looking for your lost keys under the streetlight?"—"Because the light is better there."

The result is a "negativity bias" towards government: a mismatched sense of the private sector's virtue and the public sector's vice.

That surely can't be said of Richard F. Fenno, Jr., a much-beloved political scientist who spent the last half of his career following members of Congress and producing analyses of remarkable insight. In his 1985 American Political Science Association presidential address, he passionately argued that "Observation is the heart of political analysis." In fact, he concluded, "Contexts and sequences of legislative life have not been observed in the rich detail they deserve, because not enough political scientists are presently engaged in observation." Fenno doesn't just talk the talk. He spent months following Dan Quayle around every day, and wrote a fascinating and useful report on what Quayle—and, for that matter, other legislators—actually do with their time.

Another exception to the rule is political scientist James Q. Wilson, who has always seen administration as the very core of politics. He devoted his career to producing studies rich in observation and detail, from his work on crime to a much-celebrated book on bureaucracy. He also produced a whole generation of

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students who have done the same. John DiIulio, for example, moved from exhaustively reported studies of prison administration to equally well-grounded work on the role of religious institutions in urban neighborhoods. Steven Kelman applied his research on government to his job in the Clinton administration as director of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy, where he spearheaded major reform legislation. Robert Katzmann has produced pathbreaking work on issues from trade regulation and disability policy to broader issues like the relationship of Congress with the courts. He's now been nominated to the federal bench.

Other scholars have produced equally rich analyses of what government is and how it really works. Todd LaPorte has written extensively on complex organizations like aircraft carriers and the Department of Energy. Erwin Hargrove has probed "impossible jobs" like running prisons and police forces. Paul C. Light has put the state of the public service back on the public agenda. Allen Schick's analysis of government reforms in New Zealand became the benchmark by which the government there measured its monumental reform.

But the heads of public policy programs quietly talk about how hard it is to hire scholars who carry on these traditions—who really understand government and produce solid research on government administration. It's risky for young scholars on the tenure chase to follow Fenno, both because it's hard to turn out a large volume of publications and because more formal work is more fashionable. Established scholars tend to get set in their research ways and to get just as caught in the field's fashions. That, in turn, makes it even harder to train students for public-service careers and to grow the intellectual capital to make government work better.

To make things worse, as veteran *New York Times* reporter David Rosenbaum points out, outsiders often find academic writing opaque. Equations and formal models scare off the uninitiated, and even articles based on more traditional methods often frighten off curious outsiders. Among busy government officials, there's often a sense that the academic literature contains a great deal of impenetrable analysis on problems they don't find important—that academics write more for each other than to shape and inform public debate. It's not hard to see how policy-makers and journalists, on the one hand, and academics, on the other, drift apart.

Breaking the Cycle

Putting the two pieces of the story together produces an unhappy tale. It's hard to escape the sense that the mass media, in the search for more viewers and readers, are too often capturing exactly the right stories in precisely the wrong ways. In the academic world, the search for scientific respectability has driven many scholars to research questions and methods that insulate them from the realities of politics. Policy-makers rely little on cutting-edge research and worry constantly about how to manage reporters' spin.

Sadly, most of the incentives in the game are loaded against busting out of this ugly triangle. Reporters know that breaking a scandal is the way to earn a reputation. Academics want tenure, so they stick to the kind of research that will help them get it. Like the social forces that drive it, government is growing and changing faster than anyone can keep up with it. Still, the rest of us need to recognize our role as well: As viewers and readers and voters, we get the media and government we ask for (and, hence that we deserve).

There are glimmers of hope out there. The reinvention movement has sparked real interest in attacking government's problems, though (in this country, at least) the toughest problems have yet to be faced. In the academy, public administration is enjoying a mild resurgence, as scholars recognize that their theories need real-world tests if anyone outside the Ivory Tower is going to pay attention to them. And some of our best journalists continue to report on what the government is doing and why.

But the triangle won't be broken until all three parties recognize that their failures are mututally reinforcing. Good government doesn't just happen by itself. It requires both a vigilant press and attentive, thoughtful scholarship—not to mention an engaged citizenry. If we don't want space shuttles to explode in midair, new species to go extinct, or deadly bacteria in our hamburgers, we need to stop the cycle that makes reporters cover the right story wrong—and scholars to miss the story altogether.

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Memo of the Month

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 21, 1999
Release No. 46

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE ANNOUNCES 'TOP 10 DOG BITE CITIES' DURING NATIONAL DOG PREVENTION WEEK

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Postal Service reported today that of 2,541 dog bite victims -- a six percent drop from last year -- more postal employees were bitten in Houston than any other U.S. city last year.

Top 10 Dog Bite Cities
Fiscal Year 1998
(mid-Sept. 1997 to mid-Sept. 1998)

City	Dog Bites
1. Houston, Texas	49
2. Chicago, Ill.	37
3. Miami, Fla.	35
4. Los Angeles, Calif.	32
5. Brooklyn, N.Y.	22
6. Cleveland, Ohio	20
7. * Buffalo, N.Y., Jamaica, N.Y.	17
8. * Dallas, Detroit	16
9. * Richmond, Va., San Antonio and San Francisco	15
10. * Baltimore, Boston, Phoenix	14

* tie

Dog bites to postal employees peaked during the mid-1980s when more than 7,000 letter carriers were attacked annually. Through aggressive employee training and public education programs that statistic has dropped by more than two-thirds.

Last year's drop of 167 dog bites to 2,541 pales in comparison to the estimated 4.7 million Americans bitten last year. More alarming is that 60 percent of the victims were small children and 900 times as likely to be bitten as a letter carrier.

To convey the message that dog bites are a societal issue, and to promote responsible pet ownership, the U.S. Postal Service and The Humane Society of the United States is sponsoring the fifth National Dog Bite Protection Week, May 16 – 22.

This year, to continue emphasizing the seriousness of this public safety issue, post offices nationwide will coordinate educational activities throughout the summer. Postmasters will work with local humane societies and animal care and control officials to provide dog bite prevention tips and helpful training and behavior information to dog owners. Additional information on preventing dog bites – including an interactive dog bite prevention quiz -- is on the U.S. Postal Service's website: www.usps.com.

HOW TO AVOID BEING BITTEN:

- Don't run past a dog. The dog's natural instinct is to chase and catch prey.
- If a dog threatens you, don't scream. Avoid eye contact, try to remain motionless until the dog leaves, then back away slowly until the dog is out of sight.
- Don't approach a strange dog, especially one that's tied up or confined.
- Always let a dog see and sniff you before you pet the animal.

HOW TO BE A RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNER:

- Don't presume your dog won't bite.
- Spay or neuter your dog -- unneutered dogs are three times more likely to bite!
- When your letter carrier comes to your home, keep your dog inside, away from the door in another room or on a leash.
- Don't let your child take mail from the letter carrier in the presence of your dog. Your dog's instinct is to "protect" the family.
- Obedience training can teach your dog proper behavior and help you control your dog in any situation.

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Getting Past the Spin

The press could do better—but so could government spokesmen

BY MIKE MCCURRY

RECENTLY AT ONE OF THOSE CHIN-stroking sessions about how the press can do a better job of covering government, I piped up and said, "Well, it might help a bit if the government did a better job of telling its story in the first place." In the days since, I have been thinking more seriously about this idea. In nearly four years as White House Press Secretary and in the half-year since I left the government, I've been asked to participate in many discussions about how the work of government gets reported to the American people. Not one invitation, though, has called for me to critique the way government makes its information available.

As Donald Kettl writes in this issue, press coverage of the executive branch has dropped significantly in recent years. When reporters do cover government, they're likely to view it through the distorting lens of "scandal," or for a local angle that might be of interest in a particular community. The bigger job of telling readers what the government does, and why, too often falls to the wayside.

How can it be that America gets less reporting about the day-to-day work of the government when, thanks to the revolutionary advance of communication technologies, we are living through an eye-popping explosion in the volume of information available? The answer is in line with a lesson taught by my former boss, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan. In a witty essay, "The Iron Law of Emulation," he postulates that organizations in conflict become similar to one another. Over time, navies, football teams, political parties, and yes, adversaries like the press and politicians begin to mimic the tactics of the other even as they continue their combat.

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How true. As news organizations in the nation's capital assigned specialists to concentrate on investigative pieces on presidential scandals, we at the White House found lawyers in the Counsel's Office to do media relations. Lanny Davis' new book, *Truth to Tell*, describes the results of the curiously symbiotic relationship that developed between the two groups.

In vast areas where the press showed less interest, the White House proved to be much more ho-hum about putting forth public information. Mind you, we scoured the agencies and departments for interesting tidbits every morning. If you had to face a pride of lions licking their chops for Lewinsky at noon, wouldn't you want to open the daily press briefing with a detailed discussion of the latest wrinkle in federal pension policy? These sessions irritated reporters but often generated requests for more information from citizens who caught a glimpse of something that might actually matter. No systematic method developed for getting these important but less-sizzling tidbits to the public.

In the main, the job of assembling information about the government's work fell to the individual agencies and their public affairs staffs. Some were good at it, but most struggled. Without a captive press corps braying at the door, there was less pressure for them to tell their stories.

Then again, some preferred anonymity. When the Congress went Republican in 1995, many agencies were suddenly barraged with requests for data and information from the Hill that began to look suspect. You didn't have to look hard to see a pattern of harassment, and before long, memos from the GOP leadership staff leaked to the press confirming that "diligent oversight" could be a euphemism for clipping the wings of an activist Democratic president. Many administration public affairs officers (and their bosses) were content to avoid any notice, lest a "meanie" Republican congressional oversight committee take interest.

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This is no way to run a government. "Democracy is not a matter of entertainment, it's a matter of engagement," write John Herbers and James McCartney in a recent *American Journalism Review* survey documenting the decreased press coverage of government. "The Constitution requires close citizen attention if the grand experiment is to continue to work." The brave media critic Tom Rosenstiel (full disclosure: my friend from high school) directs the Program for Excellence in Journalism and often says "journalism is a series of commitments, a series of responsibilities. It's about being accurate, being courageous, telling people things that are important as well as interesting, finding ways to make the important interesting." The Pew Charitable Trust's Rebecca Rimel, a Joan of Arc for better journalism who funds work like Rosenstiel's, writes that "Americans want statements that they can believe in. They want information that rings true ... But citizens do at times succumb to indifference and some fall into cynicism."

AFP PHOTO/STEPHEN JAFFE

Exactly. But journalists fall into cynicism too, and the government often falls short in providing those facts that are necessary for educated debate in our democracy. I am confident that the press will worry about its own performance. (The poor editor of this magazine has even cooked up some prize money to reward reporters who dig into the workings of government.)

I would rather concentrate on why the government seems to be missing the ball. In basketball, coaches tell their players it's hard to miss a pass but easy to toss the ball in a misguided direction. Maybe the same is true here. Perhaps the government's effort to inform the public has been missing the mark.

But there is not much pressure from the press to improve the public information function of government because reporters are instinctively suspicious of government flacks. They don't believe folks from the government can be there to help, to provide useful information and tell interesting stories. But I know—having listened to many idealistic young press officers ask how they could increase interest in their agency's work—that there are plenty of people who want to get better information into the hands of the American people.

What stands in the way of better public information from our government? I count at least a dozen formidable barriers:

● Most organizations hate coping with bad news. If you believe in what you do, it's a natural instinct to disbelieve bad news. The first reaction of administration spokesmen, hearing the initial reports of something like the NATO bombing of Chinese diplomats in Belgrade, is stunned disbelief. Say it ain't so. I'll never forget stammering something almost like a denial when *The New York Times* told me that my first boss—a U.S. Senator back in the 1970s—was about to be named in the ABSCAM corruption probe. In trouble with the press or the public, most outfits start by shooting themselves in the foot and making matters worse. After all, it's a human reaction as natural as a child's denial when the hand first gets caught in the cookie jar.

● Government officials can get addicted to praise. Averse to criticism, officials and politicians can also be mesmerized by a compliment. There are so few stories in the press about government programs that work well (waste, fraud, and abuse being considered by many reporters the norm) that it truly is "news" when something goes right and gets reported. Rather than replicate that success, many cabinet officials and their subordinates try to take credit for the same story over and over. The president's economic advisor, Gene Sperling, became masterful at finding new ways to hail good employment reports every month, but only when we were lucky did news organizations carry the

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President's quote. One-trick dog shows don't get many repeat customers. It takes a pattern of success—like James Lee Witt's smooth handing of the Federal Emergency Management Administration disaster after disaster—to finally get sustained notice from the press.

● The White House will steal good news. At many early morning staff meetings at the White House, I remember various presidential aides complaining about some cabinet official who hogged a good piece of news. "Hey, that belongs to the big guy," they'd say. Decreasing coverage of government means that well-intentioned cabinet officials will fight harder to keep good news stories to themselves. As a result, some cabinet departments would work hard to discount whatever good stories they did have to tell, indicating to the White House that their press conference later in the day would not be a big deal and that the folks at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. shouldn't be worried. We weren't. We just didn't pay attention and help build up interest in the story. Cabinet public affairs officers are always told to help "amplify" the president's message, but since his megaphone is bigger, the White House usually doesn't amplify stories that emanate from lower down in the bureaucratic food chain.

● There is no systematic, government-wide process for public information. While there are plenty of White House meetings on "message amplification" to get members of the administration on the same page when it comes to projecting the political argument on behalf of the president, there is no process for dealing with the routine, sometimes embarrassing information that ought to reach the public. Much of the recent contretemps over exchanging sensitive technologies with the Chinese sounds to me like an echo of turf fights between the State and Commerce Departments on who should control licensing. Someone should have been sitting in on this process and reminding policy-makers that the public needs to know the parameters for these exchanges and the reasons why we do or do not engage in trade with respect to certain technologies. More openness on these questions would have headed off a lot of the partisan huffing and puffing that we are hearing now. There are interagency working groups to make policy, but few interagency efforts to create interest in the news. Public affairs personnel are often invited to the decision-making table late.

● There are plenty of resources for communication, but they are not always used efficiently. For this article, I tried to get the Office of Management and Budget to give me an idea of how many people are involved in the government's public information arm, and at what cost. This information is hard if not impossible to get, because no one wants to put a big number out there that suggests the executive branch is spending bundles to toot its own horn. (There's no question that the figures are large; the four armed services alone employ roughly 4400 public affairs officers.) It may also be that the resources aren't accounted for separately because most agencies see the public affairs function as a regrettable expense, not as part of the agency's mission. Though public affairs officers tend to work in the immediate orbit of the cabinet or agency head, they're often treated like mere bureaucratic seat-warmers, and the relevance of their work to the department or agency gets lost. My anecdotal experience is that there is plenty of money and more than enough people—both career and political employees—to help get the public the information it needs. The way the bureaucracy organizes and treats its public information function stands in the way of using these resources wisely.

● Political appointees and career public information officers often mistrust one another. This problem is perennial in all parts of the federal government. Career civil servants devoted to principles like the public's right to know are often suspicious of political appointees who seem most interested in currying favor for the current occupant of the White House. Building bridges between the career workforce and the political temps who work as their superiors is the toughest part of managing the work of the federal government, and is an especially acute challenge for those who labor in the politically sensitive area of press coverage. Very little is done to help politically-appointed managers learn how to supervise, reward, and encourage career civil servants. Many career workers, as a result, sit around figuring out how to outlast the latest batch of political appointees. My own experience with this at the State Department gave me an opportunity to liberate a career worker who went on to help figure out how to get the diplomacy of the United States onto the Internet. I worry that many talented career civil servants never get that kind of chance.

● There are few career rewards for those good at informing the public. In fact, those pegged as good press officers often get stuck in the role. In the civil service, military, and foreign service, public affairs work is not highlighted enough in the job evaluation process. Promotion in rank to flag officer, Senior Executive Service, or career minister status ought to

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depend in some measure on how well an applicant can respond to questions from the public and the press. Gen. Colin Powell was awfully good with that wooden pointer at his press briefings on CNN during the Persian Gulf War, and it certainly helped his career. However, these skills have not proven to be valued highly enough to become a part of the evaluation process for career government workers.

● The greatest energy in government public affairs operations is reserved for moments of drama—crises, scandals, and elections. It's easy to get folks to give their best when backsides are against the wall. The creativity, determination, and hard work it takes to communicate well increases in election years, or when a big bad story creates howls from higher-ups to change the subject. I'll never forget being paged at a restaurant by Steve Akey, the chief of Department of Transportation communications, who called to report the downing of TWA Flight 800. He already had a talented staff, soon augmented by the National Transportation Safety Board and the FBI, on high alert to provide good, solid information to the public. This team worked hard for days, giving briefings to the attorney general, the transportation secretary, and the president himself on what we knew and—as it turned out, more important—what we did not know.

But during routine times, a desire not to rock the boat leaves many public information operations in the doldrums. The trick is to find ways to keep the pulse rate high when the only drama is the goverment doing its job well.

● The language of government communication is not very user-friendly. Like many professionals, government executives often speak in a blizzard of acronyms and code phrases that are indecipherable to the layperson. I had to study the foreign language of foreign policy for three months before I ventured out to brief the State Department press corps in my Foggy Bottom English. (Rule #1: Never say the word "Jerusalem" unless it is in direct reference to the phrase, "Our policy is so well-known that it does not need to be repeated.") Sometimes the language of government is necessarily complex because the subject matter is dense. Trade journals and specialty publications have sprung up to help targeted audiences learn more about these activities. But most of the time, the people who should be translating government-speak into plain English give up, or spend the balance of their day talking to specialists.

● Sometimes there are legal and institutional barriers to offering the public information. Governments have secrets to keep in order to protect our national security and for that reason some information has to be classified. But classification should not be an excuse to withhold information merely because it might be politically damaging or inconvenient. It is sometimes against the law for the government to provide information, as is the case of U.S. Information Agency officers working overseas who are prohibited from disseminating information to stateside audiences—a relic of the Cold War when we worried that our own overseas propaganda might not sound that sweet here at home. But it makes little sense in the global information age when everything you say is available instantaneously around the world.

Many administration public affairs officials were content to avoid any notice, lest a "meanie" Republican congressional oversight committee take interest.

● Some information is hard to verify because it is provided anonymously. Every government has "leakers." However, information provided by unnamed sources is unreliable because the leaker's motives are frequently unknown. Are we getting this little morsel because someone inside government lost a policy fight and is trying to even the odds? Or is someone just trying the prove that he is "in the know," even when he may know only a few pieces of a complicated puzzle? Leaks have become a time-tested means of getting news out. We did it at the White House all the time, usually to keep a given subject in the news more than one or two news cycles. But those who leak don't realize how much they impede the government's ability to inform the public. When you can't identify and measure the reliability of your sources, you tend to discount the information. My fondest dream is this: Everyone who speaks to the press for the government does so on on-the-record and without a penalty.

● Much of the government's most important

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information is uninteresting and is provided in uninteresting ways. Let's face it: Having one poor soul stand at a podium in the White House briefing room and answer questions on behalf of an entire government is an especially outdated format for communication when so many more effective techniques and technologies exist. The advantage should go to those that can make the work of government visual, engaging, and exciting. Most public information efforts at present don't meet that test.

***

These barriers are formidable. They stand in the way of a better-informed public. Often, the public and the press don't even know the right questions to ask.

Now the good news. At the cusp of the 21st century, we are experiencing the greatest transformation in information technology since ink was first pressed onto gilded paper. The press and government offices won't have to suck thumbs much longer at academic conferences about the quality of media coverage. The public is about to take matters into its own hands.

Within a few short years, our tools for unearthing information about the government will evolve dramatically. The Internet, personal computers, television, newspapers, magazines, telephones, radios—the essence of the public soapbox—are about to converge into a new set of home appliances that will redefine the entire concept of public information.

High-speed access to digital information anywhere, anytime will put a new premium on the ability to communicate. American citizens won't have to wait for a daily press briefing, a nightly news broadcast, or the thump of a folded paper landing on the front porch to get information. It will be available all the time on-line, and citizens will custom-tailor the way they receive their news.

Reporters and government information officers will have to make their stories more compelling, immediate, and useful to a time-sensitive public. In the Internet age there are fewer rules that govern the adversarial relationship between the government and the press. This means the relationship must evolve into a more amicable and less acrimonious one.

Look at government web sites and you can already see the transformation taking place. When I arrived at the State Department in 1993, there was no inter-office computer network in the Office of Public Affairs, let alone any ability to communicate with the outside world.

Two years ago, the General Accounting Office examined forty-two government agencies that spent almost $500 million to create interactive agency websites. Now there are more than one thousand agencies listed in a directory of web sites maintained by government agencies. They may not be as "hot" or "cool" as some sites, but they get good reviews.

Online you can:

➡ Read a daily digest prepared by a new, customer-friendly IRS.

➡ Ride with the Air Force Reserve's 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron on a virtual trip into the eye of a hurricane.

➡ Access your own Social Security earning account,

➡ Learn the environmental hazards in your own neighborhood via the Environmental Protection Agency.

➡ Go to the Housing and Urban Development web page to find out how communities can work together.

➡ Adopt a wild horse or burro from the Department of the Interior.

➡ Go to the Central Intelligence Agency web page and get 10 straightforward answers to ten obvious questions about the CIA and, as a bonus, go to the CIA's interactive and entertaining site for kids.

Looking at these sites, I get giddy about the possibilities for improving the government's ability to address the people's right to know. Remember, though, that it is hard for government and the politicians who run it to tell the truth. That's why we need people who will push and prod from outside. There is, in fact, an Association of Public Data Users, which includes information specialists at federal depository libraries, who are making federal web sites more effective and responsive.

My guess is that all levels of government will get better at informing the public over the next several years. Local governments are leading the way by making data available on things that matter most: job openings, building code requirements, how to get driver's licenses, how to dispose of waste, how to get birth and death certificates. These basic uses of public information will help drive a new, more interactive approach to communicating with the American public.

The changes are likely to be so profound that one day website managers who develop one-on-one solutions for citizens seeking public information about their government will be better known and more popular than White House press secretaries. That would make this former press secretary smile. ●

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Code Blue

How managed care is putting emergency care into shock

By Howard Isenstein

Most Americans take it for granted that if they have a heart attack or get in an accident, highly qualified help in an emergency room is but a short drive away. Don't believe it. Growing numbers of hospitals around the country—and their emergency departments—are shutting their doors due to financial pressures. Those that remain are reducing emergency services by pooling their resources with other hospitals or simply by cutting quality.

Emergency departments are the bulwark of the country's health care system. Not only are they the first line of defense when there are actual emergencies, such as plant explosions, airline disasters, and the like, but they are also critical in saving more routine heart attack and auto accident victims. Emergency physicians say that patients such as these need to be seen in the so-called "golden hour" immediately after the onset of their problem or risk irreparable harm. Emergency departments also serve as the primary health care provider to tens of millions of poor and uninsured Americans who lack the means to access more conventional settings like doctors' offices.

But such a safety net doesn't come without a price. Emergency departments must maintain high levels of readiness 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by employing skilled teams of physicians, nurses, administrators and other highly trained staff, and by keeping up with the latest life-saving technology. While surgical and other hospital departments are equally or more expensive to maintain, they enjoy well-insured patients who can pay their bills. Emergency departments, by contrast, are perennial money losers because their patients often cannot.

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Until the 1990s, insurance companies and their employer clients were willing to shell out to support emergency departments and pricey healthcare in general. But that changed with the rise of managed care, a euphemism for rationing. Employers, stunned by double-digit premium increases, answered the siren call of managed care organizations, including HMOs and preferred provider organizations, which promised negligible rate increases. Today, about 85 percent of all employees with health insurance are in some sort of managed care plan.

For much of the mid-to-late 1990s, HMOs delivered on their claims by negotiating steep discounts with hospitals, doctors, and other health care providers. HMOs also delivered by limiting—sometimes harshly—access to and time spent in hospitals. In May, for example, the New York state attorney general's office said it was investigating some managed care plans for allegedly telling patients and doctors that patients must first get approval from their primary care doctor to be covered for an emergency room visit. New York, like many other states, passed legislation that requires health plans to provide coverage of emergency room visits for people who have symptoms that a prudent layperson would consider an emergency. This investigation jibes with a study that surveyed academic departments of emergency medicine across the country. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents reported that HMOs routinely discouraged their enrollees from using 911 services, and 16 percent reported that HMOs provided 911 services to take patients only to participating hospital emergency departments.

Hospitals that couldn't or wouldn't find ways to make up for the shortfall in revenue caused by managed care's hardball tactics closed their doors. Between 1995 and 1996, 180 medical-surgical hospitals with licensed emergency services disappeared, according to the American Hospital Association (sig-

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nificantly more than the 141 closings in 1994-1995).

Those that remained open scrutinized expenses and focused on the biggest ways to get rid of money-losing services. Not surprisingly, emergency services were at the top of the list. Hospitals merged emergency services with those of affiliated or nearby hospitals, reduced staffing levels, substituted less qualified employees for those more qualified, and took other measures. The result is that getting emergency services is harder than ever.

"One of the big concerns of these consolidations of hospital systems and closure of beds is that those that remain may not be able to provide the [emergency] care needed," said Dr. Francis L. Counselman, chairman of the department of emergency medicine at Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, Va. "People just go to another [emergency] department, which puts ... incredible strain on the remaining hospitals."

Between 1995 and 1996, 180 hospitals with licensed emergency rooms disappeared, following 141 closings in 1994-5.

Patients pay the price of that strain most visibly, Counselman said, through increased wait times and possibly through tardy intervention. "Instead of an hour and a half wait, it's going to be a two and a half hour wait or a three hour wait. Then the concern is that there's somebody out there [in the waiting room] who can't wait that length of time, like someone with abdominal pain that ends up being an ectopic pregnancy," a dangerous condition.

The situation is most acute in areas where managed care has made the greatest inroads. Take the Bay Area around San Francisco. In early 1997, a series of patient deaths in emergency rooms was attributed to inadequate nurse staffing, inexplicable delays in transport, lack of doctors on call, and nonexistent quality assurance, as reported in *Modern Healthcare*. For example, on Feb. 12, 1997 Willa Hives, a resident of Vallejo, Calif. drove to Kaiser Permanente's hospital in Richmond, Calif. only to learn that its emergency room wasn't staffed to treat her condition—chest pain—because it was a "standby" emergency room and not a full-scale emergency room. Kaiser's larger Oakland hospital had no beds available, so Hives was taken to Summit Medical Center in Oakland. She was dead on arrival.

And in affluent Marin County in September 1997, an auto accident victim had to be taken to three hospitals to find an ER properly staffed to care for her. She died after surgery at the third.

These and other incidents prompted the state's Emergency Medical Services Authority to conclude in a draft report that California's emergency systems and hospitals don't have enough capacity to handle catastrophes—no slight possibility in an area prone to earthquakes, forest fires, and freeway accidents.

Such problems are directly attributable to falling emergency capacity in the state. Between 1995 and 1996 coverage in terms of emergency department hours dropped 10.4 percent, and 12 emergency departments closed (2.8 percent of the state total), according to a study headed by Dr. A. Antoine Kazzi, an associate professor of medicine in the division of emergency medicine at the University of California at Irvine.

While coverage is down, doctors are being forced to do more at the same time, including filling out reams of paperwork to satisfy managed care companies and seeing about 5 percent more patients per hour than a few years ago, which could hurt their ability to spot problems, Kazzi said.

Not surprisingly, some legislators in California are incensed. A bill that would have given county governments the right to restrict the closure or reduction of emergency care services failed to pass the California Assembly by one vote on June 3, after intense lobbying against the measure by California hospitals.

But it's not clear that this kind of regulation will work even if the bill is brought up again and passed. The real issue is funding. Managed care won't put up with subsidizing money-losing emergency rooms and Medicare, the other major hospital payer, has stated loudly and clearly that the days of hefty reimbursement rate increases are over. So hospitals, even if regulated, will have no other choice but to cut corners if they want to remain viable. More than likely, legislators at the state and national level will ignore the issue until a full scale emergency wreaks havoc, exposing the lack of emergency capacity. Only then will they have the gumption to consider funding an essential service. ●

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The Lesson of Kosovo

When intervention is a risk worth taking

BY DAVID CALLAHAN

AS WITH MOST WARS, THE HISTORY of NATO's air campaign in the Balkans will be written in fits and starts. A final verdict on the war's wisdom and success will depend on many uncertainties, including Western success in rebuilding Kosovo, the fate of Slobodan Milosevic, and the future of U.S.-Russian ties. Yet even at this early moment, with so much still unknown, one thing seems clear: The war's many vocal naysayers in the United States got it wrong. Rarely have so many experts disgorged so much nonsense into print and over the airwaves. Day after day, at times nearly gleeful in their predictions of gloom and doom, critics condemned the war as a bungled operation predicated on a naive faith in airpower. President Clinton, they claimed, had solidified his place as an incompetent and pusillanimous commander in chief.

Years from now, or even months from now, a very different view on Kosovo is likely to prevail. Assuming the West undertakes the right diplomatic repair work with Russia and follows through on pledges to rebuild Kosovo, NATO's first real military campaign will be seen as a just and successful war, albeit one that was poorly planned and imperfectly executed. A brutal autocrat was faced down, saving the Albanians of Kosovo from a future of Serbian repression. While the human, economic, and diplomatic costs of NATO's air campaign have been considerable, this negative fallout will seem less significant as time passes, especially if the Kosovars—who believe the war was well worth it—help to shape the future image of this conflict.

Beyond agreeing that the war was justified, tomorrow's commentators are likely to agree on a few key points.

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Clinton Shows a Spine

Every president, especially one who has studied history as diligently as Bill Clinton, knows that war is a highly unpredictable game. Whenever bombs start falling, the risks begin to rise. Kosovo was no exception, and Clinton deserves credit for gambling big on a war that always had the potential to go bad.

From the beginning of the Clinton presidency, U.S. policy in the Balkans has been an ongoing case of no good options. The ever circumspect Secretary of State Warren Christopher once went so far as to call Bosnia "a problem from hell." Through late 1998 and early 1999, Clinton again faced an agonizing dilemma in a part of the world devoid of vital U.S. interests: If the Serbs refused to accept a negotiated agreement in Kosovo, NATO could either do nothing in the face of Serb barbarism or it could use military power with no guarantee of success. Clinton was also fully aware that Milosevic might respond to the bombing with ethnic cleansing. (CIA Director George Tenet had publicly predicted as much in February.) And, of course, he knew that NATO's air campaign would infuriate Russia. For all these reasons, intervening in Kosovo may have been the biggest gamble in U.S. foreign policy since Jimmy Carter tried to rescue the hostages in Iran.

Sweeping Kosovo under the rug, as the administration had done with Bosnia for two years, would have been easy. Clinton might have drawn strong domestic criticism for allowing the Serbs to finish off the Kosovo Liberation Army this spring and reneging on past U.S. promises to stop the bloodshed in Kosovo. But the long-term political consequences of inaction would have been nil for the president.

Clinton took an alternate course for many reasons. Clearly, there were traditional realist concerns at work regarding the stability of Europe and the credibility of NATO. But Clinton was also motivated by a desire to do the right thing and defend human rights. This

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is a president who will likely go to his grave haunted by U.S. inaction in Rwanda and Bosnia. In those two crises, nearly a million people perished at the hands of ethnic extremists while the United States stood by and did nothing. The endgame in Bosnia in 1995 showed that America might have been able to stop that war much earlier, while Clinton himself has apologized to the Rwandan people for failing to take actions that could have stopped the genocide there. In Kosovo, Clinton showed that he had learned something from these deplorable episodes in U.S. foreign policy—lessons invoked often, if obliquely, in his defense of NATO's air campaign.

Air Power

In acting on hard-learned lessons from Rwanda and Bosnia, President Clinton disregarded a more cautious approach to American intervention abroad, preached most fervently by former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell. In the view of Powell and many like-minded national security specialists, America should avoid the incremental use of force, only risk its soldiers when vital interests are at stake, and intervene only when there is a near certainty of victory. Kosovo met none of the criteria of the so-called Powell Doctrine. This was a limited war in defense of limited U.S. interests with no guarantee of success.

NATO's victory in Kosovo has dealt a serious blow to the Powell Doctrine, and that is a good thing. Threats to limited U.S. interests merit a range of limited responses. Military force has to be on this menu. While Powell was right to oppose the large-scale use of ground forces when no vital interests are at stake, he was never persuasive in arguing against the use of any military force in defense of limited interests. America's successful intervention in Bosnia in 1995 made this clear. Even Somalia, arguably, showed the merits of a limited interests/limited response model: Only 26 Americans died in an operation that saved over a million people from starvation.

The excessive rigidity of the Powell Doctrine was predicated on a deep skepticism about air power. Some of this scepticism is warranted. For example, bombing could have done little to stop the genocide in Rwanda, and there will always be military situations that require ground troops.

But on the question of whether the bombing would work in Kosovo, critics of NATO's air campaign showed an extraordinary narrowness. Combining poor history with an ignorance of current military technology, they repeated the mantra that airpower had never won a war and especially could not win this war. They were wrong. Even while taking excessive precautions against casualties, and even in the face of terrible weather and a shortage of aircraft early on, NATO warplanes slowly and methodically weakened Serbian ground forces in Kosovo. Through the use of pilotless drones, satellite reconnaissance, infrared imaging, and radar tracking systems, NATO was able to locate and destroy such elusive targets as mobile Serb artillery, camouflaged armored vehicles, and combat units on the move. Meanwhile, dug-in Serbian forces were pounded ceaselessly by high-intensity bombs and the supply lines from Serbia needed to sustain 40,000 troops in the field were systematically cut. Once NATO's aeri-

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al strike force became fully operational during the war's second month, often working in concert with KLA forces on the ground, Milosevic's capitulation became only a matter of time.

Humanitarianism Comes of Age

The Clinton Administration's talk of a crusade for human rights in Kosovo elicited much snickering on both the left and the right. The left, and most notably the *Nation* editorial page, found these claims absurd, observing tartly that the United States arms Turkish military forces repressing the Kurds and Indonesian forces repressing the East Timorese. The war in Kosovo, the left argued, was about reasserting American dominance in Europe through an expanded NATO. Meanwhile, right-wing critics such as Pat Buchanan criticized Kosovo as the latest example of U.S. foreign policy devolving into social work.

Intervening in Kosovo may have been the biggest gamble in U.S. foreign policy since Jimmy Carter tried to rescue the hostages in Iran.

Both sets of critics were off base. The neo-isolationist right ignores the strong idealist tradition in U.S. foreign policy, which propels American presidents to intervene in situations like Somalia and Kosovo, a tradition that has great support among influential segments of the American public. The left is even more detached from current reality. Wedded to dated notions of American imperialist malevolence, the left has failed to grasp the growing centrality of human rights in U.S. foreign policy. Seeing little change on traditional human rights concerns—such as barring arms sales to dictators or cutting off trade with repressive regimes—the left sees business as usual in America's acquiescence to tyranny abroad. The transformation they miss, or play down, is the way in which humanitarian goals have been slowly defined as core national security concerns during the 1990s.

Beginning with the huge U.S. relief operation in Kurdistan in 1991, the United States has spearheaded several major humanitarian interventions thoughout the world, including those in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia. NATO's air campaign can be seen as the culmination of this shift in official thinking. The intervention in Kosovo has been a war like no other in U.S. history, a war in which America's humanitarian motives carried easily as much weight as strategic motives. A pure realpolitik approach would have counseled ignoring the south Balkans backwater and concentrating on improving relations with Russia and China. That Clinton did the opposite shows just how deeply humanitarianism has penetrated to the core of U.S. foreign policy calculations.

The cooperation of 18 other nations in wresting Kosovo from Milosevic's grip also underscores the breadth of support for the new humanitarianism. Considered in a larger context, it is clear that longstanding principles regarding national sovereignty are being rethought among those western elites who have traditionally structured the rules and norms of the international order. This trend is not new, but it has noticeably accelerated in recent years with the creation of an International Criminal Court and attempts to strengthen a variety of collective security institutions.

Of course, such humanitarian interventions are likely to proceed very selectively in the future. The plights of the Kurds in Turkey or the Chechens in Russia or the Tibetans are not likely to elicit Western crusades any time soon. Inconsistency, indeed outright hypocrisy, will remain the rule rather than the exception in the new crusade. Nevertheless, one thing is clear: In the wake of Kosovo, nationalist dictators have more reason to think twice before embarking on genocidal behavior.

Multilateralism Gets a Boost

Another frequent and foolish criticism of the Kosovo campaign heard this spring was that the war exemplified U.S. unilateralism. Again, the charge came from both the far left and right. The left saw the United States as leading NATO by the nose in its usual arrogant and hegemonic way, while blithely ignoring the legitimate authority of the United Nations. Isolationists on the right, such as the Cato Institute, complained that the United States should-

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n't be solving Europe's problems. In truth, however, NATO's campaign in Kosovo represents one of the most important steps toward multilateralism in the post-Cold War era.

It has often been noted that the war in Kosovo was NATO's first major military undertaking in its 50-year history. Less commonly heard was the point that Kosovo was the first war fought by any formal alliance of democracies since World War II. More so than the Gulf War, this war was fought by committee, with 19 nations agreeing on all major decisions. The United States was the dominant member of this committee, but it still needed to achieve and maintain consensus through essentially democratic processes during weeks and weeks of war. Never has NATO multilateralism been put through a more demanding test.

And, far from being an occasion for Washington to reassert its hegemony over Europe, Kosovo appears to have boosted Europe's independence. Encouraged by European assertiveness on Kosovo, the European Union recently announced that it would create a military arm to bolster Europe's ability to respond to future security challenges. This initiative represents Europe's most ambitious effort to end its dependency on American leadership since the end of the Cold War.

And what of the United Nations? Kosovo presented a terrible dilemma for those who embrace both the new humanitarianism and a stronger U.N. But given that Russia would surely have vetoed any use of force against its fellow Slavs in Serbia, the choice in Kosovo was clear: use NATO to stop Milosevic's repression of the Kosovars, or do nothing. NATO's actions in Kosovo clearly violated the letter of international law, but they upheld the spirit.

A global security order predicated on true multilateralism must have a powerful United Nations at its core. That dream will not be in reach until all the permanent members of the Security Council are democratic states. In the meantime, relying on NATO—the largest alliance of democracies in history—may not be such a terrible thing.

So was it all worth it? Was it worth a million Kosovars expelled from their homes, thousands executed en masse, several thousand civilian deaths in Serbia, the destruction of critical Serbian infrastructure, and the opening of a major rift with Russia?

The answer, of course, depends on whom you ask. It's too early to say how the war will affect European stability, future military strategy, or diplomacy between NATO countries and the rest of the world. In the meantime, perhaps the opinion that should matter most is that of the Kosovars. They are the ones who bore the brunt of NATO's decision to finally stand up to Milosevic, who were driven from their homes and, in many cases, raped or murdered. Much of the criticism of the war has focused on how NATO simply worsened the plight of the Kosovars, triggering the humanitarian catastrophe it sought to prevent. In this analysis, the war ranks among the greatest follies of recent history.

Yet nearly every Kosovar interviewed by a print or broadcast reporter from the beginning of the war cheered NATO's actions. The Kosovars believe the war was worth it, and for reasons familiar to any historian of the modern era. Like so many other national groups in recent centuries, the Kosovars have been willing to pay a high price for freedom. Taking the long view, they believe it is far better to live in refugee camps for a year or two and return to a ravaged homeland than to live forever under Serbia's iron fist.

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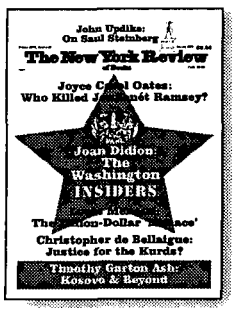

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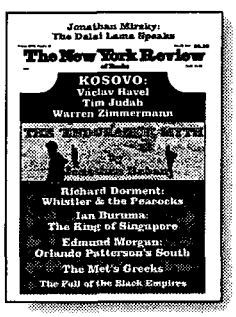

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A Father and a Spy

A son's memoir and Soviet cable decrypts provide different perspectives on Alger Hiss

By David Ignatius

THE VIEW FROM ALGER'S WINDOW: A Son's Memoir
By Tony Hiss
Knopf, $24

VENONA: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America
By John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr
Yale University Press, $30

I'VE NEVER HAD MUCH USE FOR post-modern literary theories—which are always reminding you, usually in unreadable prose, of the rather obvious point that there's no "objective" meaning to a work of literature or historical event independent of its cultural context. That kind of theorizing makes me very glad I escaped graduate school before it was too late.

But these two books, both touching on the story of Alger Hiss, offer such radically different accounts that you can't help thinking that there really are different kinds of truth—conditioned by the different stances of the observers, derived from the differing nature of the evidence they cite, and ultimately incapable of speaking to each other. That's why some historical arguments never end, despite what one side regards as irrefutable factual support for its view. They can't agree on what "was" was.

Tony Hiss has written a loyal and loving memoir about his father, Alger Hiss, perhaps the most famous spy in modern American history. The book's title, "The View from Alger's Window," refers to the window in Greenwich Village from which the father would gaze, before he was sent off to Lewisburg Penitentiary on a perjury conviction, and from which the son would gaze during the 44 months his father was incarcerated. Tony Hiss calls it a "time funnel."

The memoir is based largely on the letters Alger wrote home to his family while he was in prison. Tony Hiss gathered the letters after his mother's death, and he has used them to recreate the kind of man his father really was—that is to say, the kind of man his son, through the letters, believes him to be. From a historian's perspective, they're the most subjective and unreliable record imaginable, since they represent Alger Hiss' attempt to explain himself to the people he loved. But they're endearing—if nothing else for Alger Hiss's absolute refusal to admit guilt, confess weakness, feel sorry for himself, or blame others.

Tony Hiss says of his father's letters: "They are a window flung open wide onto a life, a bird of the spirit springing into the air, a heart made plain." The son finds in the letters nothing whatsoever that would support any notion that his father was ever a communist, much less a spy. Instead, he finds a man who made up charming stories about the wily and resourceful Sugar Lump Boy to boost his son's spirits; a man who worked lovingly over those nearly four years in prison to teach his fellow inmates to read; a man whose greatest pleasure while in prison was the simple act of writing to his wife and son.

The Alger Hiss of these letters comes across as a starchy, WASP version of Roberto Benigni's character in "Life is Beautiful." It's almost as if he's inventing the world described in these prison letters to distract his wife and son from the horrific reality he was actually living through. It's touching, and you can see why Hiss' supporters stuck by him so doggedly over the years; he really does seem like a nice chap.

The son asks: How could such a man have been a spy? He tries to buttress his case with the recollections of his half brother Timothy, who remembered visits to the Hiss house in the 1930s by the man who

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later named Alger as a spy, the former communist turned red-hunter, Whittaker Chambers. Based on Timothy's highly personal and subjective testimony, Tony Hiss describes one of Chambers' key charges as "fabricated without even a seed of truth" and agrees with Timothy's conclusion that the whole spy story was "mostly poppycock."

The larger purpose of Tony Hiss' memoir, in addition to asserting his father's innocence, is to argue that prison may actually have been the best thing that ever happened to him. "Alger died a happier man with Lewisburg behind him. He got closer to other people, he got closer to his soul ...[J]ail is where Alger became a human being."

Perhaps the ultimate crime for a son is disloyalty to his father, and Tony Hiss has certainly escaped that fate. Indeed, what's weirdly admirable about this book is its doggedly loyal obliviousness to the factual evidence of his father's guilt. In that sense, Alger Hiss would be proud of his son, who has carried the refusal to admit guilt into the next generation.

****

The other sort of evidence—what most of us would regard as the "real" evidence, is contained in *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*, by John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr. The book is a careful explanation of the greatest codebreak of the Cold War (at least, the greatest we know about) which was the National Security Agency's decryption of nearly 3,000 Soviet cables from the 1940s. These cables were encrypted with theoretically unbreakable one-time code pads (where the same code supposedly is never used twice). They were broken thanks to a ludicrous example of real life in Stalinist Russia—the need for code workers to increase their output when the Soviets entered the war against the Nazis. To meet the quota, the code workers apparently ended up duplicating some of the code pads. That doubled their output and got the commissars off their backs, but it rendered the codes vulnerable to decryption. The NSA spent more than 30 years decrypting these cables, tracking down the leads, and matching code names with real people. The existence of these intercepts became known to the public in the '80s, but amazingly enough the NSA didn't officially reveal the existence of the Venona Project until 1995.

Haynes and Klehr recount all the major espionage cases described by the intercepts. Anyone who still has a shred of sentimentality about the Old Left should read their account. "The deciphered cables of the Venona Project reveal that hundreds of Americans had formal ties to Soviet intelligence services in the 1930s and 1940s," they write. The Soviet spies included at least six people in the State Department (including Hiss); eight people at Treasury; a White House assistant; several prominent scientists in the Manhattan Project; at least one officer of the CIA's predecessor, the OSS; and many journalists. It's an appalling story. American Communists were used ruthlessly by the Soviets to advance their espionage agenda. And, it must be said, many of these Communists were eager enough to steal whatever Comrade Stalin wanted. The authors don't tell this story with much panache—the human drama tends to give way to page after page of names, dates, code-names, and cables. But when you stand back and consider what a cynical operation the Communist Party was, you begin to have more sympathy for the people who decided to name names. Ratting on your friends, as people like Elia Kazan did, wasn't admirable. But reading this account, you can't help but feel that it was justified.

The authors, in fact, think Venona shows the Soviets began the Cold War earlier than anyone had realized, at a time when Washington and Moscow were supposedly friends and allies. They write that "the Cold War was not a state of affairs that had begun after World War II but a guerrilla action that Stalin secretly started years earlier."

The evidence against Hiss, as laid out in the cables the Soviets were sending home, is quite devastating. Hiss' 1950 perjury trial showed that he had passed documents to a Soviet military intelligence (GRU) ring headed by Chambers during the '30s, when Hiss was a rising young star in the State Department. The Venona intercepts add damning evidence that Hiss continued helping the Soviets during the 1940s. Several cables discuss the spying activities of someone with the code name "Ales," who the NSA and FBI concluded was "probably Alger Hiss." Indeed, one of the cables talks about how their source Ales had been at the Yalta Conference and then went on briefly to Moscow—a description that, according to the authors, could only fit Hiss.

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Communications intercepts like the Venona cables have a special status in the intelligence world. For spy buffs, it's almost a matter of epistemology—these intercepts are how we know what we really know. They're the highest and purest form of knowledge possible, since they recount what people said in their private internal messages. That's why I've always admired the NSA, and been vexed by the efforts of civil libertarians and computer-privacy freaks to block NSA's ability to intercept and decrypt communica-

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tions. These are the people who really know things—the ones whose information might save us from a biological terrorist or alter the course of a future war. If they'd let us use the information, that is.

Codebreaking is the ultimate secret. The British allowed Coventry and other cities to be bombed, lest they tip off the Germans to the Enigma codebreak. The United States let many spies go unprosecuted, lest they reveal the extent of our Venona codebreak. Indeed, one can argue that U.S. officials allowed the horrors of McCarthyism to go forward, simply to protect the Venona intercepts. The Venona cables provided hard evidence of the guilt of the Rosenbergs, David Greenglass, Alger Hiss, Harry Dexter White, and many dozens of others. But this evidence was withheld. Even President Truman wasn't told the details of Venona. The public was left to wonder whether the allegations were part of a witchunt by J. Edgar Hoover and Joseph McCarthy. That uncertainty would have disappeared, for reasonable people at least, if the Venona evidence had been shared.

Rarely has secrecy had such disastrous political consequences. McCarthyism was a blight which brought a polarizing suspicion and intolerance—not simply of communist spies, but of people with unconventional opinions—from which the country is only now recovering. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan and others have argued, if our political leaders and the public had realized that the espionage charges were documented by the rock-hard evidence of communications intelligence, the story might have been different.

And yet, to read Tony Hiss' memoir is to be reminded that there is another kind of knowledge—for which intercepted communications might as well remain encrypted, for all the difference they make. The "truth" a son knows about a father is impervious to "fact."

And it's no less real for that. That's where the post-modernists have it right. As Janet Malcolm has observed, there is only one context in which events can have happened in precisely the way they're described on the page—and that's in a novel. Only fiction is irrefutable.

The First Lady

A new biography is another example of how lucky the Clintons are in their enemies

By Marjorie Williams

JOYCE MILTON'S BIOGRAPHY OF HILLARY Rodham Clinton beats to market several others that were commissioned in the wake of the Lewinsky scandal. The book business, in finding Hillary Rodham Clinton an ever-more-interesting subject, has mirrored the feelings of the public at large, which rewards the first lady with rising approbation for every new evidence of her humiliation by her husband. *The First Partner* is of little help in boosting our understanding of this strange phenomenon. Mostly it's a further exhibit—as if any were needed!—of how lucky Bill and Hillary Clinton have been in their enemies.

The First Partner, the work of a right-wing writer, has the strange air of having been conceived and written about six years ago. It includes, of course, an account of last year's scandal; but mostly it's a book that woke up when Hillary first burst upon the scene and decided that America must be saved from the demons of centralized planning that Hillary was plotting to unleash upon the land. Even granting, for the sake of argument, Milton's contention that Hillary came to Washington hell-bent on pursuing an agenda more liberal than her husband's, it seems strange for Milton to care so much. For one thing, the first lady's biggest effort in the direction of federal gigantism, her health care reform plan, collapsed more than five years ago. And Milton's approach ignores the obvious point that, in neutering his own presidency for the sake of his dalliances in the Oval Office, Clinton necessarily neutered Hillary's supposed co-presidency, too, leaving her only the weird consolations of being the wronged wife.

Hillary Clinton can be criticized for many things—in particular, helping her husband embitter an entire year, perhaps an entire era, of our politics in

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the service of his perjuries. As soon as she decided to take the offensive on his behalf, she became socially, if not legally, as culpable as he for embroiling the country in his year-long deception. The question of how this smart, driven woman got herself there—especially, what story she has told herself about her life and her marriage—is indeed an interesting one.

And Milton essentially grasps this version of Hillary's sins. But the sins she seems most interested in are of a kind that seem anachronistic—both because we're now so near the end of Clinton's sputtering presidency, and because our politics have mostly (happily) evolved past the battles over socialism and communism in which Milton labors to place Hillary Rodham Clinton.

She makes heavy weather, for example, out of Hillary's summer law school internship with Oakland lawyer Robert Treuhaft, the avowed communist who was married to the late Jessica Mitford. "While it is easy to see why a young, idealistic law student might have gone to work for Treuhaft in 1972," Milton intones, "one would also hope that she would eventually come to see that communism was not just a colorful variant of leftish idealism. Unfortunately, Hillary has never said or written a single word to indicate that she has." Then again, she's never said or written a single word to indicate that she *hasn't*. Ah, but there's all that collectivist rhetoric; there was Hillary's extensive involvement in the legal services movement; there's her career-long push for day care regulated and subsidized by the federal government.

THE FIRST PARTNER:
Hillary Rodham Clinton
By Joyce Milton
William Morrow & Co., $27

It's entirely legitimate for a conservative to quarrel with Clinton's writings and proposals, which certainly do show a proclivity to believe in the power of Big Government. But when was the last time you heard a writer describe a contemporary figure, without a trace of irony, as a "fellow traveler"? This is what Milton calls Spelman College president Johnnetta Cole, who was appointed in 1992 to head the Clinton transition's education planning. In criticizing Lani Guinier, the president's one-time nominee to head the civil rights division of the Justice Department—whose writings offer a conservative a really lively chance to engage the left's assumptions about race—Milton devotes equal time to Guinier's father, who was a "functionary," in her loaded word, in the American Labor Party in the late '30s and early '40s.

One can argue that the first lady's likely run for the U.S. Senate makes her views and associations more salient than ever. But a senate race, especially under the beady eye of the New York media, is its own sort of corrective to extremist views—as is the senate itself, should Hillary win the seat. The possibility that she will go on to have a long political career of her own doesn't fully account for Milton's alarums, which marry anti-Communist fervor with the anger of those who have argued that as first lady, Clinton has been unaccountable for her influence on public policy. There's a lot of justice to the view that the Clintons blurred the boundaries of her role in ways that are unacceptable; it's all to the good if the first lady steps forward and becomes answerable for her own views. But to believe, as Milton does, that we're in some real "danger" of seeing "Hillary and her allies ... push through a comprehensive government program" for universal day care is close to delusional.

My real quarrel with this book, however, is that it fails to answer the same question that has defied every other Hillary-explainer. Why does she stick with him? Some of the satisfactions of being constantly wronged—the admiration of others, the power that accrues to her in times of crisis—have become apparent over time. But no one has ever really explained how the arrangement evolved. Milton comes closest in her chapters dealing with the Clintons' early years in Arkansas, when the bright, ambitious, fashion-impaired Hillary followed her beau to Arkansas only to discover him in the arms of a series of beauty queens. She does a persuasive job of imagining how pained Hillary must have been by this, but doesn't really help us to understand what glue kept her at Clinton's side.

Milton does quite a good job of describing Hillary's astonished reaction to Clinton's family—especially its bone-deep denial of brother Roger's drug habits. As she suggests, it's interesting that Hillary's denial of the obvious about her husband was beginning to develop at the same time she was denouncing her in-laws' blindness during the family therapy that followed Roger Clinton's conviction on cocaine charges.

But Milton gets lured into the same trap as almost everyone else who writes about Hillary—which is to accept the convenient fiction that Hillary is above all a creature of her marriage. Hence, Milton seems more interested in the problems of Hillary's in-laws than in her parents. While she does a fair enough job of summarizing Hillary's childhood, she fails to follow up on the single most striking element of that family history, which is the childhood of her mother, Dorothy Howell Rodham. Dorothy was born in Chicago to a 15-year-old mother and a 17-year-old father, and later abandoned by them. At the age of

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eight, she was sent—with her three-year-old sister—across the country by train, with no adult help, to live with a hypercritical grandmother in California. The raw facts of that story—the neglect, the sadness of it, the huge early responsibility—suggest the extraordinary legacy Hillary might have inherited as Dorothy's only daughter. It's certainly the most obvious place to look in explaining the first lady's sense of embattlement and her adhesion to a marriage that must have caused her furious pain.

But Milton is more interested in raking over the tired coals of Whitewater, Madison Guaranty, and Hillary's commodities trades. The tone of these financial passages is, at first, temperate. But as the book rolls on, Milton dredges up every rumor she turned up—including rumors of Clinton misbehavior that I'd never even heard before—with reliance, at key moments, on the works of leading Clinton-haters like Ambrose Evans-Pritchard and Gary Aldrich. (Her acknowledgments also include a valentine to the right-wing web site "Free Republic," which recently hosted a dinner in Washington honoring the House Managers of the president's impeachment trial.) By the time of Vince Foster's 1993 suicide, Milton is no longer even pretending to tack her allegations to the known facts. She writes, "Foster had other papers in his possession likely to be ... sensitive, including the copies of the Clintons' tax returns, a file marked 'Hillary Clinton, Personal,' and, for all anyone knows, documents relating to the Clintons' use of private investigators to track various women connected with Clinton in the past."

For all anyone knows? For all anyone knows, Milton wrote this book at the behest of aliens who abducted her during a picnic three summers ago. As she recited the right-wing catechism of the Clintons' misdeeds, I found myself shaking my head once again at how successfully the president and first lady have created the enemies they need. I would have thought it was impossible, at this late date, for anyone to provoke me into defending the Clintons: I felt and still feel that Clinton's offenses last year called for his impeachment, and I think we're still just beginning to find out how his legacy will play out in our politics. Yet I found myself rising reflexively to discount Milton's rumor-mongering, as well as the prosecutorial zeal with which she goes after Hillary Clinton for such curious offenses as decorating the Blue Room badly for Christmas.

Finally, *The First Partner* fails to shed much light on why it is that Hillary Rodham Clinton remains a figure of such enduring interest and, in some quarters, such an admired one. Why did her approval ratings shoot up when the president admitted to having lied—to her as well as to us—about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky? Why do her numbers begin to sag when pollsters ask how they would feel about Hillary divorcing The Big Creep? I've argued elsewhere that women should disregard all politicians' wives, Hillary among them, in hashing out their own issues of autonomy and identity and career-vs.-family; political spouses' lives are impossibly distorted by demands that other women can't imagine. But the temptation persists to treat Hillary as the national Rorschach.

Is she venerated for being his dupe? Or is she venerated because she isn't? Is she us? Or is she the doormat we don't have to be, because she's doing it for us? It would be unfair, I guess, to blame Joyce Milton for leaving us with these questions, whose answers may be better sought in a mirror than in a book. ●

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The NRA and the Battle for Gun Control
An Expanded Edition
By Osha Gray Davidson

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Getting Religion

How crime, illegitimacy, and baby boomer demographics kindled a religious revival

By Steven Waldman

AFTER DESCRIBING HOW SOCIETY FELL apart in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s (rising crime rates, illegitimacy, etc.), Francis Fukuyama asks, "Are we fated to slide into ever-increasing levels of social and moral disorder, or is there reason to expect the disruption is merely a temporary condition?" One has the feeling that Fukuyama started work on this book seven or eight years ago, before the crime rate plummetted and illegitimacy trends reversed, but didn't have the heart to rewrite his book around those important new facts. Nonetheless, there is much that is thoughtful and original in this book.

THE GREAT DISRUPTION: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order
By Francis Fukuyama
Free Press, $26

The first half is dedicated to Fukuyama's analysis of the "Great Disruption," the period when, to use the social science jargon, our supply of "social capital" diminished. Divorce rose, crime spread, and people became less trusting of their institutions and of each other. Fukuyama often seems on the edge of adopting the standard conservative "critique" (Fifties Good! Sixties Baaaad!) but his argument is actually more nuanced. Fukuyama, author of the controversial book *The End of History*, argues that the cause of the Great Disruption was not so much the liberal welfare state (as conservatives suggest) or income inequality (as liberals suggest) but something more fundamental: the technological revolution.

The normal explanations offered are not satisfactory, he notes, because many of these negative social trends occurred throughout the Western industrialized world—including countries with lots of welfare and those with little; those with great inequality and those with less; those with civil liberties protections for criminals and those without. So he searches for causes that were common to all Western industrialized nations.

One cause he identifies is the birth control pill. The pill, he argues, led to family breakup, one of the main causes of the Great Disruption. This happened not because oral contraceptives eroded the morals of women, but because they unleashed the natural piggishness of men. "Since the Pill and abortion permitted women for the first time to have sex without worrying about the consequences, men felt liberated from norms requiring them to look after the women whom they had gotten pregnant." Hence more illegitimacy. "What changed after the '50s was that many rather ordinary men were allowed to live out fantasy lives of hedonism and serial polygamy formerly reserved only for a tiny group of men at the very top of society." Hence the high divorce rate.

With men on the verge of ditching their wives at any moment, any sensible woman would endeavor to become financially independent—hence the drive for women to join the workforce (another cause of the Great Disruption). And that's where the computer chip comes in, according to Fukuyama. The pressures for women to join the workforce coincided with a proliferation of the types of jobs that women were better-suited for and a decline in the types of jobs more inherently suited to men: "Put in its starkest form, an information-age economy substitutes mental for physical labor, and in this sort of world women inevitably have a much larger role to play." The increase in illegitimacy, divorce, single motherhood, and working moms led, in turn, to more crime, which led to gated communities and declining trust.

This logical chain has some weak links. Fukuyama overstates the extent to which information-age jobs are woman-friendly and manufacturing jobs man-friendly. Most assembly line jobs can be equally well done by women and certainly most technical jobs are perfectly well-suited to men. Moreover, many divorces were initiated by women, not their husbands. Many women joined the workforce not to strengthen their financial independence, but because they wanted to be psychically fulfilled. Finally, the idea that the pill-induced boom in male irresponsibility led to illegitimacy has a small flaw in the logic: If the gals were taking the pill,

STEVEN WALDMAN, *a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly, *is starting an Internet project related to religion.*

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they wouldn't have gotten pregnant.

But Fukuyama is on to something when he identifies these massive economic forces, rather than government policies, as the key to the riddle. He's also right to argue that crime had a major effect on social capital. Fear of crime drove people into suspiciousness, isolation, and gated communities, and it fueled racial tension. While he ignores other reasons for segregation—some white flight came not from fear of crime but fear of blacks—he understands what liberals have often missed: Their cherished goals of community togetherness can only work when Law and Order prevail. We can sing "Kumbaya" more—if we let the police crack some heads.

Much of the book is devoted to a separate question: Given that society's norms have eroded, can they be re-established? After a highly academic digression about whether norms have biological or social origins, Fukuyama concludes that yes, with some difficulty, society can be "re-normed." This is important not only for the obvious reason that a Re-Normed Society is a Happy Society, but also because the new economy requires it. Silicon Valley grew in part from an informal culture in which techies and entrepreneurs shared information in ways unthinkable in other industries. Information-based companies need to be lean and non-hierarchical, and that can't happen without a certain amount of collaboration and trust.

(Permit me an irresistible digression: Fukuyama notes that many of the information-age pioneers "arose out of the communal norms of the Bay Area counterculture of the late '60s and '70s." Combine this with the fact that while the Internet was not created by Al Gore, it was indeed created by the government, and one is left with the delicious irony that the technological revolution that has transformed the world grew out of a combination of Haight-Ashbury and Big Daddy Government.)

Because Fukuyama was so busy studying whether it was possible for these nasty social trends to reverse, he missed the fact that they already have. In part, the explanation for the improved conditions seems to be what criminologists called the "younger brother syndrome." Many boys who saw their older brothers die in crack wars decided it wasn't worth it. Some girls who saw their big sisters get pregnant out of wedlock decided they weren't to be emulated.

Harder to pinpoint is whether the activities of community groups and religious institutions helped drive home the message. Fukuyama argues that religion is a powerful means of instilling a sense of trust and community:

"Instead of community arising as a by-product of rigid belief, people will come to belief because of their desire for community. In other words, people will return to religious tradition not necessarily because they accept the truth of revelation but precisely because the absence of community and transience of social ties in the secular world makes them hungry for ritual and cultural tradition. They will help the poor or their neighbors not because doctrine tells them they must but because they want to serve their communities and find that faith-based organizations are the most effective ways of doing so."

The evidence on this is mixed. Much of the new interest in spirituality is highly personal in nature. People are reading books, going online, and attending retreats in order to find "inner peace," not in order to form neighborhood block watches. But there is a parallel trend that better fits Fukuyama's analysis. Many people are indeed returning to religion to find a sense of community. A great example is the mega-church, the fastest growing form of worship. These are humongous churches that combine electrified music with theatrical sermons to create an entertaining Sunday morning experience. Often cited as an example of the "Malling of America," they are actually examples of the opposite. Most mega-churches are so large that they can create scores of smaller groups geared toward particular needs—single mothers, alcoholics, bible studies. Think of the church as the town and the small groups as the neighborhoods.

There has also been a big increase in the number of people who have joined independent "small groups" to pray or discuss religious or ethical matters. Outside the auspices of institutional religion, they provide an excuse for people to get together and share intimacies. By one estimate, there are four million of these small groups.

I share Fukuyama's view that a thirst for community has helped fuel the resurgent interest in religion. But it's a secondary, not a primary factor. The main cause is demographic: The Baby Boomer cohort has hit the stage of life when they think about spiritual things. Older Boomers have seen their parents die and begun to face their own mortality; younger Boomers now have young children and are trying to figure out how to raise them so they don't shoot up their high schools.

If conservatives have to swallow the idea that the greatest economic boom in a generation was spawned by hippies and bureaucrats, it's only fair that liberals have to accept the idea that the secret to community renewal may be religious revivalism. ●

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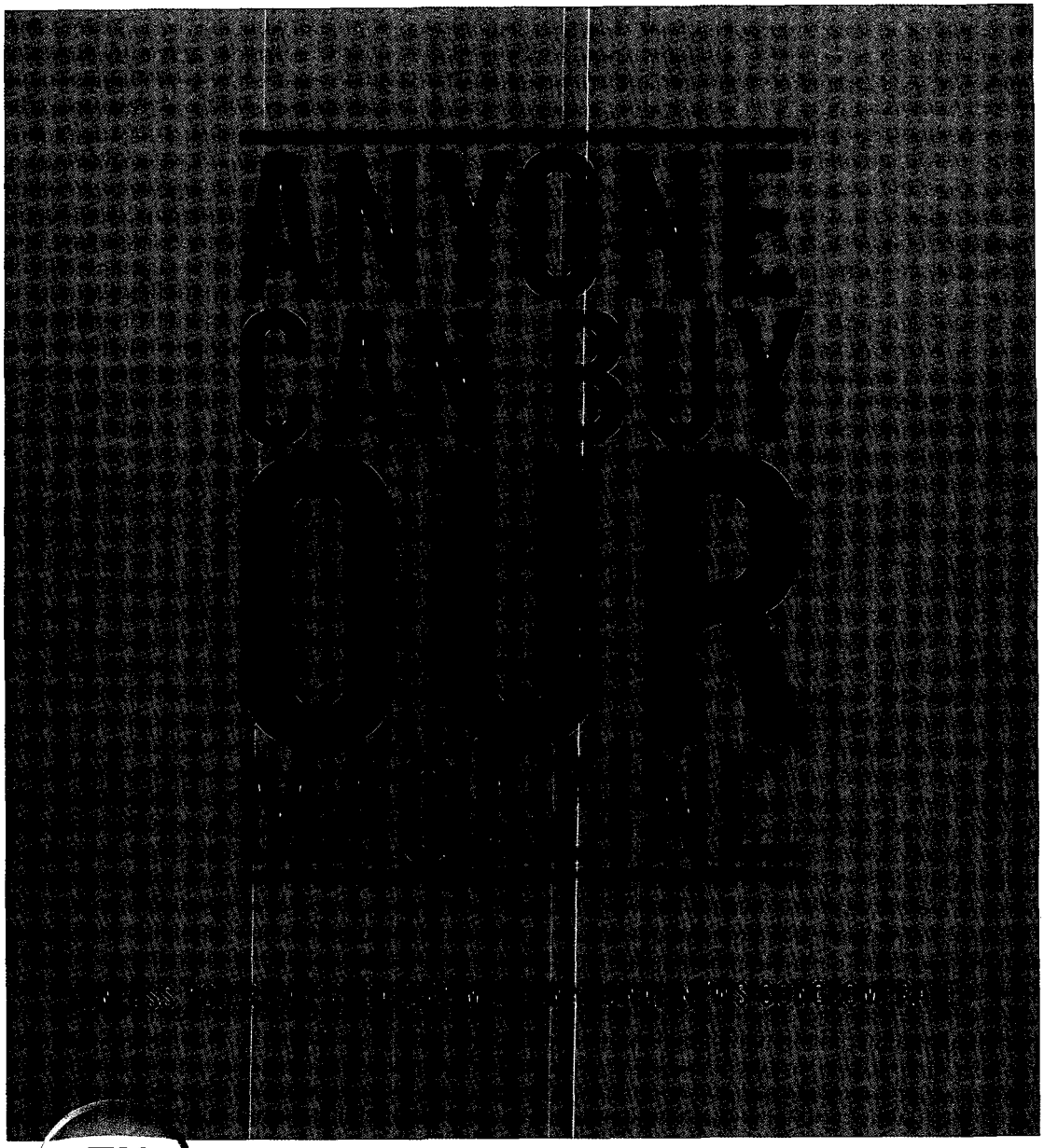

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The Healing Power of Truth

How South Africa came to terms with its past.

By James North

I "KNEW" WHO MURDERED MY FRIEND Griffiths Mxenge, the black South African human rights lawyer and underground member of the African National Congress, as soon as I read about his death in the newspaper in November 1981. His killers tried to make it look like a nighttime robbery, cutting his throat and stabbing him so viciously the knife got caught behind his ribs. But I knew the apartheid regime, in some way, was behind his death.

I also knew the regime was responsible for killing other friends of mine: Anton Lubowski, the white human rights lawyer, a young man of great courage and humor; David Webster, also white, a gentle anthropologist who helped start a support committee for political detainees; and Petrus (Nzima) Nyawose and his wife, Jabu Nyawose, two black trade union activists, former garment workers, who belonged to the outlawed ANC. Every time I vote, even when I'm annoyed at the narrow range of choices, I think of Petrus, who was killed by a car bomb when he was 37 years old, without ever having cast a ballot.

COUNTRY OF MY SKULL
By Antjie Krog
Random House, $27.50

The only questions were secondary ones. From how high up the chain of command came the orders to commit these and other murders, and to arm and abet the "third force" paramilitary bands that contributed to 20,000 deaths in the last years of apartheid? Did white Cabinet ministers, or even apartheid presidents P.W. Botha and F.W. de Klerk, order the killing directly? Or did the highest officials make the same kind of indirect suggestions that the English King Henry II did to encourage his knights to murder the principled archbishop Thomas Becket—some modern version of "Will no one rid me of this meddlesome priest?" It was possible in a few cases that zealous mid- or lower-echelon security police, perhaps in league with the neo-fascist right, killed on their own. One thing was certain: The apartheid police never pursued any of the killers, who therefore knew they could act with impunity.

Antjie Krog's skillful, passionate new book about South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission makes it clear that black South Africans felt just as I did. Krog is a poet-turned-journalist, and she followed the Commission on its lengthy journey around South Africa as it listened to witnesses from Cape Town to the Limpopo River, taking more than 20,000 statements. She explains that blacks were not surprised to learn that the people who had kidnapped, tortured, and murdered their children and relatives were security policemen, agents of an internationally-recognized government that numbered Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher among its friends.

But many white South Africans had not known—or had not wanted to know. Krog is an Afrikaner, part of the 60 percent of the white population who have a reputation for racial intransigence and were proportionally overrepresented in the apartheid regime, including in the ranks of security police torturers. Her pained examination of herself, her family, Afrikaners, and white South Africans in general gives this book tremendous power. Yet despite her searing and fearless self-scrutiny, she does not go far enough up the chain of command. She ends up, by omission, exonerating the CEOs of big Western banks and corporations and the governments of Reagan and Thatcher, who were deeply implicated in sustaining apartheid and who also said nothing about torture and murder.

Krog set herself a difficult task. Readers outside South Africa will find it hard at times to follow the unusual names, the unfamiliar places, and the

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JAMES NORTH *spent four years in southern Africa researching* Freedom Rising, *a first-hand account of apartheid. His forthcoming book,* Structures of Sin, *is about the human implications of globalization.*

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complicated political landscape, even with the help of a glossary. But Krog's skill, along with the nature of the testimony itself, guarantees that this book will still have an impact, even for people who don't fully grasp the different players.

In one memorable scene, a black member of the new Parliament, Tony Yengeni, questioned a white security police captain who had tortured him a few years earlier. As Krog points out, Yengeni did not use the opportunity to vent his rage at the police captain, but to probe what sort of person was capable of nearly suffocating a person to death.

Krog's pained examination of herself, Afrikaners, and white South Africans in general gives this book tremendous power.

Torture victim asks torturer, "What kind of man ... uhm ... that uses a method like this one ... to other human beings ... repeatedly ... and listening to those cries and groans ... and taking each of those people very near to their deaths ... what kind of man are you, what kind of man is that, that can do ... what kind of human being can do that, Mr. Benzien?"

Many of the Truth Commission members and reporters who covered the dramatic public hearings became depressed and even physically ill as they listened day after day to such painful testimony. Krog shows the Commission's chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, holding the search for truth together with superhuman grace and compassion. One of Tutu's finest moments came with the appearance of a defiant Winnie Mandela. The Commission took testimony about abuses on all sides of the political struggle, and witnesses had already linked her to a gang of young men, based in her home in Soweto, who savagely beat and even killed people they suspected of disloyalty, including a 14-year-old boy. Why Nelson Mandela's now ex-wife, once a courageous symbol of resistance, went bad is still not clear, although Krog's report suggests that acute alcoholism seems to have played some part.

In a dramatic moment, Tutu looked directly at Mandela and asked her to stop denying the truth. As the entire nation held its breath, he won from her, finally, an admission that "things went horribly wrong," a grudging and half-hearted admission, but an acknowledgment nonetheless.

The Truth Commission was created as a political compromise between the old regime and the new government. It was based on a simple premise: Those who told the truth would be offered amnesty for their crimes. The Commission succeeded partly because it offered amnesty on an individual basis. This is in contrast to Latin America, where one country after another returning to civilian rule promulgated blanket amnesties, recusing torturers from answering for their crimes. Two decades later, many of the mothers who demonstrate in the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina still do not know what happened to their "disappeared" children.

In South Africa the truth process had a tremendous and perhaps unexpected impact on victims and their family members. Lucas Baba Sikwepere, who was blinded when security police opened fire on a small community meeting, sat in front of an audience he couldn't see and said: "I feel what has been making me sick all the time is the fact that I couldn't tell my story. But now I—it feels like I got my sight back by coming here and telling you the story." The most common request from family members of the disappeared was for their remains, so the dead could be given proper burials.

Not all the victims reconciled. Mrs. Charity Kondile, who heard how her son was murdered and burned, refused to forgive the security policemen responsible. "It is easy for Mandela and Tutu to forgive," she said. "They lead vindicated lives. In my life, nothing, not a single thing, has changed since my son was burnt by barbarians ... nothing. Therefore I cannot forgive."

One remarkable fact emerges: The number of actual torturers was small. The same names appear and reappear in testimony. This is consistent with the experience in other countries. In the early 1970s, the courageous Greek democrat Alexandros Panagoulis exploded when journalist Oriana Fallaci asked him if the years of torture he had endured had made him incapable of loving human beings. "Of still loving them?" he asked incredulously. "Of loving them more, you mean! God damn it, how can you ask such a question? You don't think I identify humanity with the brutes in the Greek military police? Why, that's only a handful of men! Doesn't it mean anything to you that in all these years they're

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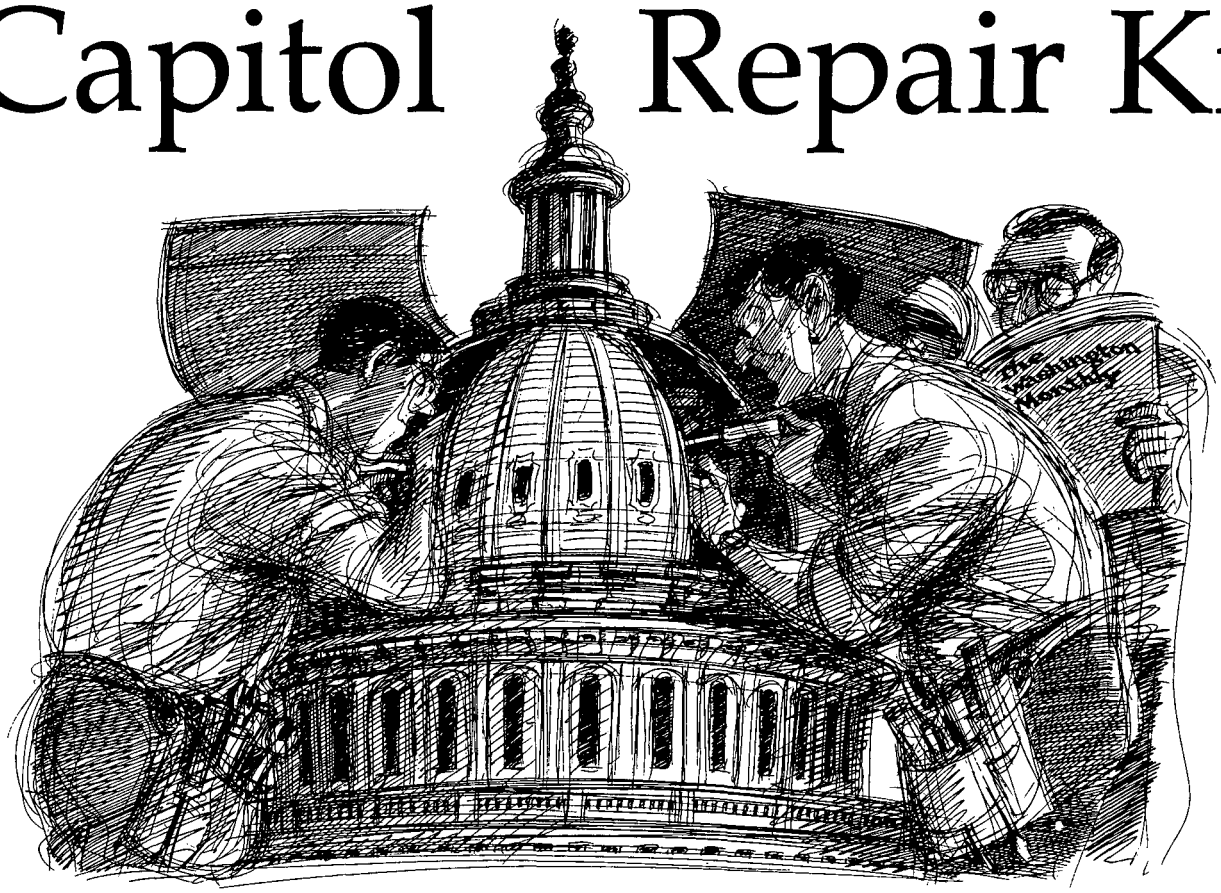

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always the same ones?"

Frank Chikane, a black South African clergyman who serves in the new government, has a similar view of his torturers. He is quoted in another excellent book on post-apartheid South Africa, David Goodman's *Fault Lines*. Chikane says he does not regard the individual security policemen as the "embodiment of evil." He blames "the guys who are enjoying themselves"—whom he defines as "the top generals, the MPs, politicians, the lot," who "have their pensions guaranteed, and who are earning even double salaries for the death of our people." Chikane insists: "If you really wanted to do justice, it's not to lock up de Kock [the most notorious death squad commander]. It's to lock up the people who manipulated the madness in de Kock, because they needed half-mad people."

Chikane's insight is both magnanimous and chilling. The security police in Krog's book do come across as brutal and unbalanced. These men took the stand, and at times with unnerving calm told how they had kidnapped and killed. But they are convincing when they say they felt they were fighting a vast Communist conspiracy bent on destroying them and their way of life, and that their actions were sanctioned from the very top.

And who can blame them for thinking that way? South Africa was no isolated backwater, cut off from the world economy. Western banks had loaned the apartheid system several billion dollars, and all over the country you could see signs of several billions more in Western investment, from outposts of Kentucky Fried Chicken to Ford and Chevrolet automobiles to IBM computers. Ronald Reagan made warm overtures to the South African regime; Morley Safer of "60 Minutes" conducted a fawning interview with President P.W. Botha, and Margaret Thatcher said Nelson Mandela's African National Congress was a terrorist organization and anyone who believed it would one day form the government was living in "cloud cuckoo land." Even more directly, the veteran American journalist Bill Berkeley, author of the forthcoming *The Color of Darkness*, has compiled convincing evidence of personal ties between high-level Reagan administration security officials and their South African counterparts.

Krog explains that the Truth Commission did conduct three days of hearings into the role of South African big business in maintaining and profiting from apartheid. Professor Sampie Terblanche, a colorful, committed anti-apartheid Afrikaner, testified that even though South African black workers had built a modern mining and industrial sector, black wages in 1972 were lower than they had been in 1911. But the Truth Commission did not—or could not—follow the chain of guilt overseas.

My friends Griffiths, Anton, David, Petrus, and Jabu are dead and nothing will bring them back, although the Truth Commission did find out, specifically, who killed each of them. This was no small matter, particularly in Anton's case. The apartheid regime tried to smear him after he was shot dead outside his home, suggesting he had actually been taking money from them as an informer. The Truth Commission crushed that lie.

My friends were very different people, and they would not have seen eye to eye on everything. But I think all of them would have agreed with the following statement: If Western banks, corporations, and governments had not continued to support apartheid, Nelson Mandela would have been elected in the '60s, instead of waiting, mostly in prison, until 1994. Globalization enthusiasts gush over our growing interconnectedness. Maybe, in that spirit, we need an International Truth Commission before which the Chase Manhattan Bank and IBM would be required to testify about their complicity in apartheid before they would be permitted to appeal for amnesty. ●

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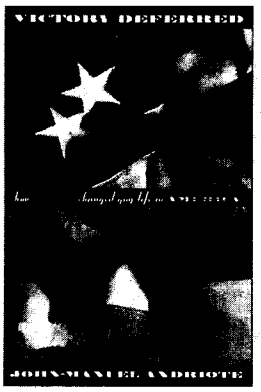

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Tidbits & Outrages

That's not the kind of job I was calling about

An 800 number listed in the Code of Federal Regulations as a hotline for draft status checks is in fact a phone sex line.

War is Peace, Black is White...

The ad firm Porter Novelli has created a slogan for the National Shooting Sports Foundation. To be shown against the backdrop of a shotgun, the slogan runs: "The very fact that it can be dangerous is what makes it safe."

Another Client for Porter Novelli

The Asian *Wall Street Journal* reported in April that a Muslim organization in Jakarta, Indonesia, has decided to establish a formal recruiting and registration office for suicide bombers, complete with brochures and promises of training. "We got 600 applicants in two days," said the office director.

Catching them "Red-Necked"

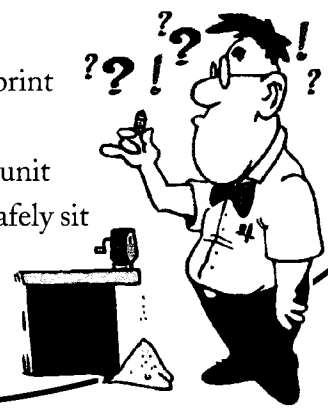
A 13-year-old boy and his 11-year-old girlfriend were charged with assault after a hickey was found on the girl's neck. "It's unwanted touching," said the arresting officer.

Next: Field Trips to the Mall

Children are being given the opportunity in numerous schools to participate in taste tests on cereals and focus groups right in their own classrooms. Robert Reynolds, president of Education Market Resources, says "the education marketplace offers tremendous potential to sell products, and to gain access to the youth market."

Next week: Pencil sharpening

Two members of the Seattle Police Department fingerprint identification section recently fell off their chairs and injured themselves. As a result, all members of the unit have been ordered to attend a class on how to safely sit down.



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Political Booknotes

A Modern Machiavelli

by Jonathan Alter

THE NEW PRINCE
Machiavelli Updated for the 21st Century
by Dick Morris
St. Martins, $21.95

DICK MORRIS IS AMERICA'S most pathetic political consultant. When his name comes up in political and media circles, it's as if there's a bad odor in the air. Beyond the toe-sucking jokes and stories about his obnoxious on-air (and off-air) performances, Morris seems to represent everything that's wrong with our politics—lack of principle, disloyalty, obsession with polls, and sleazy personal behavior. He can't even fake modesty, refusing, for instance, to acknowledge here that he blew it when he predicted huge GOP gains in the 1998 midterm elections.

And yet. Maybe he has a Mephistopheles effect on me, but I still think the guy is very smart about the subtleties of American politics. When he worked for President Clinton, I put the ratio at about one brilliant idea for every nine duds. His syndicated column is full of dumb theories, like suggesting Hillary Clinton was raising money in New York for a campaign somewhere else. In this book, his batting average improves. Although it is not nearly universal enough about the nature of power to bear his typically grandiose comparisons to Machiavelli, Morris' little volume is the kind of book where you find something to underline on practically every page.

For instance, Morris is the first to plausibly explain how the Internet will change politics, which he says is moving from "trust" in representatives and experts to "self-reliance"—from a Republic to a democracy. Soon enough, he writes, we'll have "web town meetings," which will function much like the referendum process in California, where the legislature has been marginalized. When the numbers participating in these unofficial web votes on issues get large enough, they will carry enormous weight with elected representatives.

On the mechanics of winning elections, Morris manages to be simultaneously sensible and self-contradictory. He argues persuasively that money doesn't matter nearly as much as message, even in state races. Then he tries to rationalize the Clinton-Gore campaign's huge expenditure of early money in 1996, without mentioning there is thin evidence the ad buys made a difference. He proves that negative campaigning doesn't work as well as people think. Then it turns out that what he really means is that negative campaigning only works when it is especially clever.

Here, Morris makes an intriguing counter-intuitive argument. Conventional thinking in politics holds that candidates must go on "the offensive." If you play "defense"—on the other guy's side of the field—you lose. Morris shows that playing "defense" is actually preferable. "Anytime your opponent hits you with a negative ad, cheer up," he writes. "It's a glorious opportunity to catch him in a misstatement or falsehood. Even if the actual facts he cites are true, but the implication isn't, you can nail him." And Morris believes Harry Truman did an "inestimable disservice to politics" by popularizing the idea that feisty candidates win when they "give-em-hell." Morris says voters actually don't like hard-hitting candidates.

The idea of quietly grabbing the other side's turf—which Clinton does so well—will probably be seen as Morris' big contribution to American politics. Democrats, he writes, base their appeal on the four "e" issues: environment, elderly, education, and economic growth. The GOP "quadrant" is crime, taxes, welfare, and fiscal responsibility. "The way to win is to transcend this architecture, not invest in it," he writes.

The Bush campaign seems to understand this, and is busy trying to poach on Democratic issues, even as Gore campaigns as a fiscally responsible welfare-reformer. We're likely to see two Morris-style campaigns in 2000.

It's not hard to see how Morris' supremely self-confident analysis could leave clients (even really smart clients) smitten. Even when he's stating the obvious ("Fundamentally, Washington is partisan but America's voters are not"), he manages to work in unconventional points. He writes, "No president, and very few governors, senators, or congressmen have ever been denied reelection because of scandal." When you think about it, he's right. The press has fooled a lot of candidates into believing they can get ahead by focusing on scandal, when the voters actually want to hear about what too often bores the press—ideas.

Morris also offers some good Clinton White House stories, like the way former chief of staff Leon Panetta dealt with leakers (he "counter leaked" to *The Wall Street Journal* that they were "losing power" or "on the way out," even when they weren't). And Morris explains how bureaucratic inertia killed some good campaign ideas in 1996. For instance, he suggested that proof of citizenship be required to get a driver's license. The idea was strangled not because it wouldn't work, but because it would. Law enforcement officials feared uncovering too many illegal aliens and overloading the system.

At the beginning of the book, Morris insists that he's out of the political consulting business for good now. I didn't believe him until the end, when he actually explains how to take the con out of consulting. Traditionally, media consultant pocket a percentage of the ad buy. This, of course, gives them a built-in incentive to recommend huge ad campaigns, even when the commercial is no longer working. These gunslingers also handle several campaigns at once, which means that they are making major decisions by phone from out-of-state, often based on fragmentary information about the local situation. To remedy this, Morris advises candidates to pay their media consultants a flat fee based on how many days they actual-

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ly show up in the headquarters—not a commission. It's a good thing Morris didn't live in Machiavelli's time. He'd be killed for explaining that.

JONATHAN ALTER *is a* Newsweek *columnist and an NBC News contributing correspondent.*

An Internationalist Gets Even

By Mike Shuster

I REMEMBER THINKING DURING the 1996 presidential campaign how nasty it was that Republican candidate Bob Dole would get up in front of crowds all over the country and mock the name of the Secretary General of the United Nations: "Booo-trus, Booo-trus Ghali." The middle-American inclination to make fun of foreign names might be tolerable in high schools or on the lips of late night TV comedians, but from the mouth of a U.S. presidential candidate, it seemed especially unbecoming. It turns out the man who was the object of Bob Dole's derision had the same reaction, in spades. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the sixth Secretary General of the United Nations and the only one to serve a single term, mentions it on page four of his just-published memoir, *Unvanquished: A U.S.-U.N. Saga*: "His mocking pronunciation of my name ... sounded like a jeering crowd, and his claim that American troops served under my 'command' invariably aroused his audiences."

UNVANQUISHED: A U.S.-U.N. Saga
by Boutros Boutros-Ghali
Random House, $29.95

Boutros-Ghali, the first Arab and the first African to hold the position of Secretary General, did not start his term as an angry man. He came to the United Nations with new and bold ideas about what role it should play in the post-Cold War world. John Major called him a lucky man, and when Boutros-Ghali published *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992, he was hailed for breathing new life into what many saw as a moribund organization. "I could not have asked for a more positive start in my job," he writes. Boutros-Ghali's ideas for coping with the proliferation of regional and civil conflicts erupting nearly everywhere boiled down to this: preventive deployment of peacekeepers at the "earliest warning of serious trouble" and peace-enforcement "combat-ready units provided by member states" to "fill the gap between traditional U.N. peacekeeping units ... and large-scale operations." These would be expensive ideas and far more controversial than they originally sounded. They would also eventually spark a suspicion and dislike in the United States that no Secretary General of the United Nations had ever experienced, and they would bring Boutros-Ghali down.

Boutros-Ghali sent the first contingent of peacekeepers to the former Yugoslavia, and with the support of President Bush, the first peacekeepers into the failed state of Somalia. There were also substantial U.N. initiatives mounted in Cambodia and Haiti in 1992. His face appeared on the cover of *Time* on January 18, 1993, two days before Bill Clinton was inaugurated as president. With Clinton came the woman who would become Boutros-Ghali's nemesis: Madeleine Albright, the new United States Ambassador to the United Nations.

Boutros-Ghali's portrait of Albright is one of the most fascinating and candid aspects of his memoir. He cannot resist taking a swipe from the start, calling her "short and plump." She seemed to "strike attitudes rather than address substantive issues." In contrast to the difficult diplomatic work of persuasion, he writes, she preferred "to lecture or speak in declarative sentences, or simply to read verbatim from her briefing books."

Boutros-Ghali relates in detail the evolution of the 1993 conflicts in both Bosnia and Somalia, and the exercise is a valuable one. His account demonstrates how apparently natural allies can work at cross-purposes and eventually end up adversaries. At the center of this is the issue of the use of military power to back up diplomacy, a central theme of the Clinton administration's foreign policy. It arose early in Clinton's first term in 1993 over the question of air strikes in Bosnia and the use of force in Somalia. Boutros-Ghali depicts the Clinton foreign policy team as hopelessly confused about the relationship between diplomacy and military force, even eager to use military force that would have endangered U.N. personnel in Bosnia and gone far beyond Security Council resolutions the United States had supported.

This confusion led rapidly to the breakdown of relations between Boutros-Ghali and the Clintonites. By the end of 1993, things had sunk so low that in a meeting among the Secretary General, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and Albright, the three could not communicate at all on the urgent issues before them: Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti. One of Boutros-Ghali's aides described this meeting as "worse than a disaster." None of the three was well-informed about all the complexities in each case (Boutros-Ghali acknowledges his own shortcomings here). Each became embarrassed when gaps in knowledge were exposed. The meeting concluded this way:

"'All right,' Christopher said finally, 'the U.S. will keep you advised more about our intentions, but the U.S. expects to be respected more by you.' 'I respect you one hundred percent,' I said, 'but I need to be told more about what you want, what you are doing, and where you want to go.'"

That didn't help. By 1994, Boutros-Ghali writes: "The United States conveyed nothing to me directly. All I knew was what I read in the newspapers."

As the pressure from the war in Bosnia intensified, Boutros-Ghali saw the U.S. role as increasingly contradictory and problematic. He calls U.S. foreign policy "utterly confused" at the midpoint of Clinton's first term. By 1995, the administration was calling for air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs, but he observes that, by opposing the redeployment of U.N. peacekeepers there, the United States was "making an air assault impossible." He concludes that U.S. policy was nothing but rhetoric. Finally, Srebrenica put an end to what Boutros-Ghali calls "the two-faced U.S. policy."

Boutros-Ghali's account of the end of his tenure as Secretary General is far more entertaining than we could expect from a diplomat. He recounts many pri-

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vate conversations with Albright and others; it is an inside look at how diplomats treat each other out of the earshot of microphones. After a particularly sharp rebuke from James Rubin, Albright's spokesman at the United Nations and now spokesman for the State Department, Boutros-Ghali told a private meeting of the Security Council that he was shocked by the "vulgarity" of Rubin's statement, which in the text he calls "despicable." A few days later, Boutros-Ghali and Albright lunched side by side and said nothing of it.

There is no doubt from his account that Boutros-Ghali is still smarting from the nasty and vindictive American campaign to prevent his second term as Secretary General. But as he acknowledges from the start, it was his bad luck (John Major's remark notwithstanding) that his re-election bid coincided with an American presidential election campaign (it rarely does). Madeleine Albright and Warren Christopher, two diplomats with acute awareness of the requirements of American presidential politics, made sure that Booo-trus, Booo-trus Ghali would not be an issue Bob Dole could exploit.

Albright ultimately succeeded in ousting Boutros-Ghali by casting an American veto in the Security Council. But the United States paid a price. The veto was over the votes of all fourteen other members of the Security Council. Albright failed to convince a single nation to support the U.S. campaign against Boutros-Ghali. He calls this a "rejection of democracy."

Near the end of *Unvanquished*, Boutros-Ghali writes that with his departure the United Nations "would be less of a target and less of a scapegoat for the United States. But I feared that it also was likely to become less in every regard." His fears were well founded. U.N. peacekeeping has steadily been curtailed since that time. The United Nations is still a cash-strapped organization. It has less to do with the former Yugoslavia than it did in the early '90s, and as a result of the U.S. bombing in December, the operation of UNSCOM in Iraq—one of the great success stories of the United Nations in the '90s—is now terminally paralyzed.

Only a future president of the United States may have the courage to return to the serious consideration of whether the United States has the power and the intelligence to use the United Nations and U.N. peacekeeping to its advantage in a world throwing up violent challenges to stability and progress in every quarter.

We cannot expect that consideration from Bill Clinton or Madeleine Albright.

MIKE SHUSTER *is a diplomatic correspondent for National Public Radio.*

The Media, Welfare, and Race

By John Harwood

FOR AT LEAST 20 YEARS, PEOPLE in and around national politics have operated on the assumption that public debate over welfare policy was powerfully influenced by race. Anger over welfare abuses was the anger of middle- and working-class whites convinced that their tax dollars were being squandered on undeserving black beneficiaries. And many journalists, in particular, assumed they knew who was responsible for inflaming those feelings: Republican politicians seeking white votes. In combination with other racially-charged issues such as crime, taxes, and civil rights, welfare has been portrayed as a "wedge" that Republicans Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush exploited to identify Democrats with their black constituents, split off disgruntled whites, and hold the presidency.

WHY AMERICANS HATE WELFARE
by Martin Gilens
University of Chicago Press, $25

Those assumptions weren't unfounded. But the most important contribution of Martin Gilens' *Why Americans Hate Welfare* is to identify the responsibility of another agent—the journalistic community itself—in turning the welfare issue into a racial Rorschach test.

It's an interesting notion, given the widespread and largely accurate belief that reporters and editors at major news organizations tend to sympathize with blacks and Democrats in those political arguments and view GOP "wedges" as callous demagoguery. The journalistic imperative to "Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable" is not an auspicious formula for Republicans in such debates.

But consider what Mr. Gilens, a political scientist at Yale, discovered from an examination of the content of TV broadcasts and newsmagazines dating back to the Eisenhower era. During the 1950s, the relatively spare media coverage of poverty was dominated by images of whites. The same was true in the early '60s, after works such as Michael Harrington's *The Other America* had helped prod a Democratic administration into launching the War on Poverty. When *Newsweek* magazine ran a twelve-page takeout on the subject in February 1964, for example, its cover photo depicted a young white girl in a ramshackle rural setting. The story highlighted hard times in Appalachia; only 14 of 54 people featured in photographs for the story were black.

But soon after, Mr. Gilens argues, coverage of poverty-related issues was increasingly "racialized." Blacks began to assume an outsized role in depictions of the poor, and particularly in stories about problems and abuse in programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children or the ill-fated Comprehensive Education and Training Act. Whites, by contrast, were featured more prominently in sympathetic portrayals of poor people, as victims of economic downturns such as the 1981-82 recession that marked Ronald Reagan's first term.

Mr. Gilens ties part of the shift toward the increasing prominence of the civil rights movement and its leaders' emphasis on the problems of the poor. And he doesn't suggest that the journalists responsible for those depictions were motivated by racism. But he does argue that "subconscious stereotypes" deeply ingrained in American culture—that blacks are lazy and thus more responsible than whites for their own disadvantage—were at work notwithstanding the journalists' left-of-center bent. Whatever the explanation, he finds those "media distortions" especially consequential, because "[t]he belief that black Americans lack commitment to the work ethic is central to

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whites' opposition to welfare."

This book is not a sparkling read. Mr. Gilens dissects opinion polls on welfare and racial attitudes at painstaking length in attempting to fathom the federal government's "feeble" attempts to combat poverty. But his conclusion that Americans support programs benefiting "the deserving poor" (Head Start, education, child care, job training) while looking askance at welfare checks will strike many readers as no surprise.

Perhaps the biggest flaw in this book, however, is one of timing. Three years after a Democratic president and Republican Congress set time limits on welfare receipt and ended the federal entitlement, welfare is not "one of the most incendiary issues in contemporary politics," as the book jacket asserts.

To the contrary, welfare and its racial subtext have largely vanished from the political radar screen. In a booming economy, rolls have plummeted with no sign of the social disaster that opponents of the 1996 reform predicted. In this happy environment, black and white Democrats are united, wielding their own political "wedges" (gun control, abortion rights, Medicare, environmental protection) against a GOP burdened by images of mean-spiritedness. And politically-adept Republicans, beginning with presidential front-runner George W. Bush, have placed top priority on shedding the party's Scrooge image and proving their "compassion" for those who need help, if not in the ways Mr. Gilens might favor.

It is true, as he observes at the end of the book, that the acid test will come in the next downturn when unemployment rises and the rolls swell again. Perhaps then Americans will "hate welfare" once again. For the moment, they're not thinking much about it at all.

JOHN HARWOOD *is a reporter for* The Wall Street Journal.

Refuting the Establishment

By Jonathan Chait

MOST PEOPLE ARE RELIEVED by the fact that the Asian economic crisis did not turn into the worldwide, government-overturning, riot- and famine-inducing catastrophe some predicted, and no doubt Paul Krugman is relieved, too. But the entrepreneur in Krugman must also feel a small twinge of remorse. His new book, *The Return of Depression Economics*, was written in the darkest moments of the Asian flu, and it is packaged as a doomsaying prophecy. And now the crisis has disappeared from the headlines, giving Krugman's book the appearance of a dated piece of apocalyptic hysteria, like some decade-old *Atlantic Monthly* cover.

That is too bad, because despite its scary title and cover image (a businessman plunging to his imminent death), *The Return of Depression Economics* is not a prediction of disaster—indeed, it is not a prediction at all. It is, rather, an argument, and an important one at that. Using the backdrop of the Asian crisis, Krugman contends that the conventional wisdom of economists, executives, journalists, and policy-makers is utterly deluded. Readers of Krugman's work might find such a statement surprising. Krugman is not one to rail against the establishment; in fact, the most persistent themes of his popular work are an impatience with cranks and amateurs and the conviction that economics is best left to professionals. Why, then, would Krugman—who has made a career out of dismissing any sweeping criticism of conventional economics—make a sweeping criticism of conventional economics?

THE RETURN OF DEPRESSION ECONOMICS
by Paul Krugman
Norton, $23.95

The answer, as Krugman explains, is that prevailing notions of international economics are actually not based on economics at all. This is a radical claim; the Brahmins of economic orthodoxy derive their authority from a supposedly superior understanding of market forces, and we are conditioned to think of any criticism of their doctrines in social or political—not economic—terms. In order to understand how such a counterintuitive thing could be true, we must backtrack a bit.

Before the 1930s, economics had a fatalistic view of recessions: They happened because the market temporarily got out of whack, or because people lived beyond their means, and so economic hardship was just the market's way of correcting itself. The only way out, the thinking went, was to allow prices and wages to settle to the corrective level. Government intervention would only make things worse.

John Maynard Keynes changed all that by arguing that painful measures, such as tax increases or spending cuts, would not help matters, but would actually make things worse. Government actions that put money into people's pockets right away, he argued, were actually virtuous for the economy as a whole. This view predominated for more than a generation, but the consensus began to fray during the '70s, when the economy slowed down, inflation skyrocketed, and Keynesian economics had no answer for the problems of the day. The solution to stagflation turned out to be painful austerity measures, enforced by an unrelenting Federal Reserve—in other words, the opposite of what Keynes counseled. In recent years, as the economy has boomed under Alan Greenspan and Robert Rubin, tight-fisted budgeting and anti-inflationary vigilance have come to be seen as synonymous with prosperity.

While this new fiscal conservatism has done spectacularly well in this country over the past decade, it has run into the same problem that Keynesianism did: Its proponents have ceased to regard it as the proper corrective measure for a given set of conditions and started to regard it as an end-all, be-all remedy. This intellectual flabbiness was dramatically exposed during the Asian crisis. As economy after economy hurtled toward oblivion, the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. Treasury Department counseled interest rate hikes and budget cuts—that is, austerity measures likely to deepen recessions. It is as if the leading thinkers on economics had suddenly returned to the early '30s, when Herbert Hoover responded to the Great Depression with tax increases and budget cuts.

This happened not because the IMF was stupid, Krugman argues, but because it willfully ignored economics.

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International investors decide whether or not an emerging economy collapses, and since they believe fiscal conservatism creates a positive economic climate, their prejudices have a self-fulfilling quality. Even if there is nothing structurally wrong with a nation's economy, if enough investors believe it to be flawed and hence withdraw their capital, that nation will sink into a recession. Following this logic, the IMF insisted that the stricken nations pursue policies that did not make any independent sense simply because they conformed to the preferences of international business.

Krugman is at his most eloquent when arguing against this conventional wisdom:

"Twenty years ago, when even advanced countries were suffering from double-digit inflation, when intrusive foreign exchange control was a source of major economic distortions and widespread corruption, to preach the virtues of price stability and currency convertibility was clearly to move the world in the right direction. But we are no longer living in that world, and the useful rallying cries of one era have become the dangerous shibboleths of another."

The orthodoxy that Krugman identifies has become so entrenched that very few people are even aware of a reasonable alternative. Critics of the particular internationalist policies currently en vogue are frequently depicted as protectionists or isolationists—and in fact, many of them are. But one of the unexpected results of the Asian crisis is that a new coterie of economists has emerged—including not only Krugman but also Joseph Stiglitz of the World Bank, Jeffrey Sachs of Harvard, and Jagdish Bhagwhati of Columbia—who favor some restraints on unadulterated international capitalism precisely because of their internationalism. In the same way Keynes argued that capitalism must be modified in order to survive, these free-traders believe that only a more rationally constructed international marketplace can maintain the support of the world's population. If there is anything edifying to come out of the Asian crisis, it is this idea.

JONATHAN CHAIT *is a fellow at the New America Foundation.*

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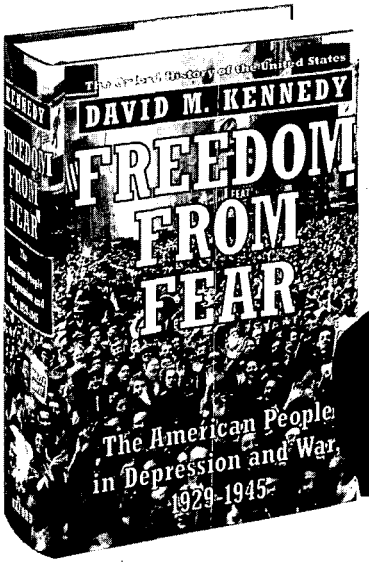

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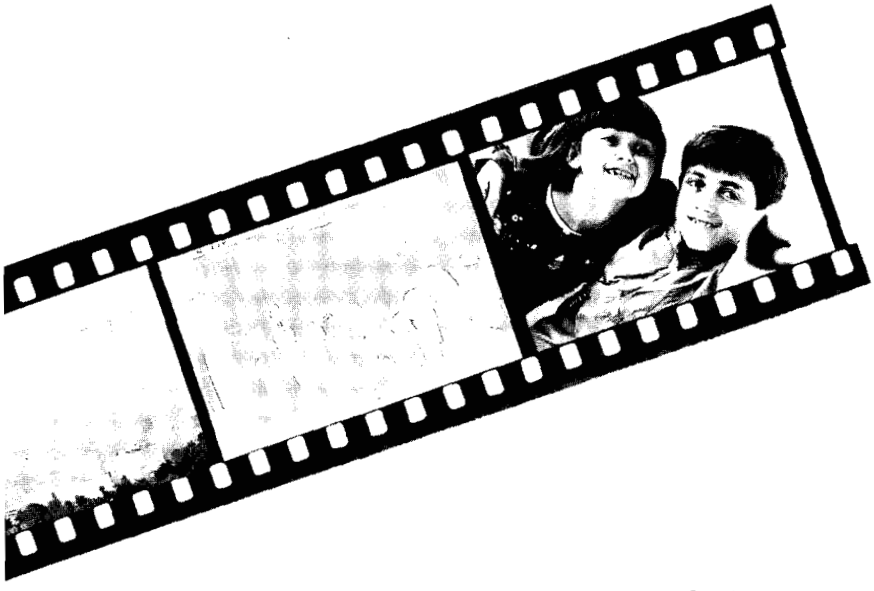

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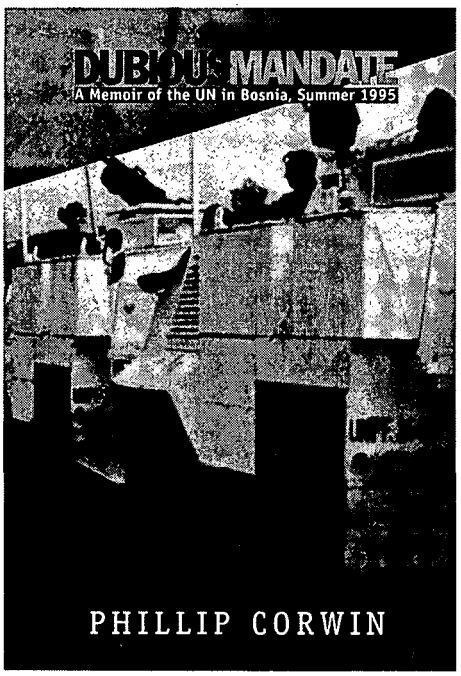

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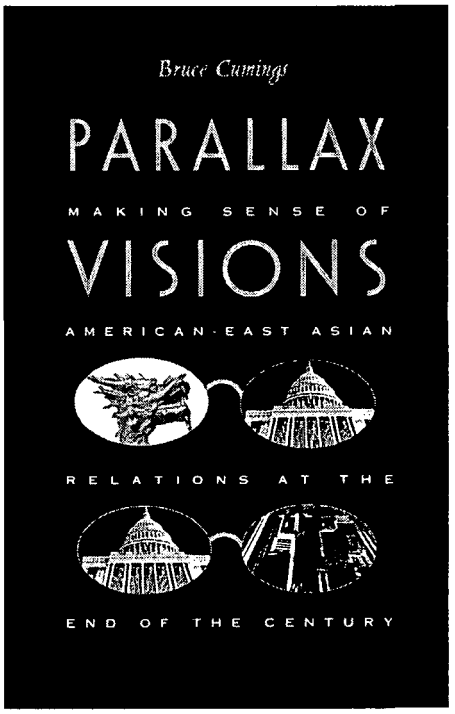

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